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· A ·
DAUGHTER · OF · MUSIC



G. COLMORE

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THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
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1918

6 f ;

G. Colmore, author of "A Daughter of Music," the latest London success in fiction, is Mrs. Colmore Dunn, the wife of a distinguished member of the Chancery side of the English Bar. She is a society woman, very well off, and lives in a house facing Hyde Park. She is very studious—prepares her novels very carefully, and does not over-write herself. She never attempts the neurotic woman in fiction, but is more akin to Charlotte and Emily Brontë in her view of the function of a novel. Note the cleverness of her titles—their aptness. The second, "A Conspiracy of Silence," was immediately seized upon by politicians and used in Parliament. For the past six years it has been recognized as a political phrase. "A Daughter of Music," her new book, just published by D. Appleton & Co., is the last London success in fiction.

A Daughter of Music.

"A Daughter of Music" recalls one of the stories in Thomas Hardy's "Life's Little Ironies." In that, a young country girl is so susceptible to the charms of music that she is drawn away from home and friends to follow the fortunes of a vagabond musician, who after a year or two deserts her and her infant child. Almost the same thing happens in "A Daughter of Music." Rhoda Wichelow, a passionate lover of music, marries Paul Garnett whom she has always known and loved. In the midst of their happiness Anthony Dexter appears upon the scene. He is a professional musician of marvellous power, and under his playing Rhoda seems to become an entirely different person. Finally she goes away with him. In the course of a few months his influence over her ceases. She leaves him and returns to England, where she tries to support herself by such work as she can procure. Here, in London, she is discovered by her husband, who compels her to return home with him. His pride is intense, and no one but himself knows the truth of her absence, everyone believing that she has gone abroad for her health with his full knowledge and consent. So they live for years with this terrible ghost of the past between them—together, yet separate—each under a curse. The end comes at last—a strangely dramatic and unlooked for end, the very horror of which brings the two together again. The book is written with singular earnestness, and with a clearly evident purpose.

[A Daughter of Music. By G. Colmore. New York: D. Appleton & Co.]

A DAUGHTER OF MUSIC

" . . . the daughters of music shall be brought low."

ECCLESIASTES.

" For whithersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless towards Thee, it is riveted upon sorrows, yea, though it is riveted upon things beautiful."

CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE.

A DAUGHTER OF MUSIC

BY

G. COLMORE

AUTHOR OF

A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE, CONCERNING OLIVER KNOX, ETC.



NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1894

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A DAUGHTER OF MUSIC.

PART I.

A FACE OF LEONARDO.

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more.

R. BROWNING.

A DAUGHTER OF MUSIC.

CHAPTER I.

In the commonest human face there lies more than Raphael will take away with him.—CARLYLE.

ON a lonely heath beside a wood stood the farmhouse of Heather Den. A road, deep-rutted and narrow, ran between the heath and the wood, and passed within fifty yards of the house; then, dwindling into little more than a bridle-path, took a wandering way back to the highroad, which it had parted from three miles back. The house was square and low, with a flat slate roof, and thick, squat chimneys; the walls were gray and bare; no ivy or climbing rose softened their hard outline, or hung drooping about the narrow-paned windows; no shrub or waving tree broke the long straight line of the front: all was cold and hard and blank. Only a single fir-tree stood on a little mound to westward, like a sign-post pointing to the sky, and the sky and the heaven beyond it seemed nearer, more easily to be reached in that lonely place, than the earth of cities and the world of men. On two sides of the house the heath stretched almost from its walls miles and miles away; but at the back, and widening out into the wood, lay the fields and grass-land of the farm. The ground dipped where the road ran, and the dip spread out into a hollow behind the house; in the

hollow lay the farmyard and buildings, and beyond, some flat, wide meadows. But soon the ground tired of the level and rose upward again ; and the ploughing horses, creeping up the brown side of the hill on autumn mornings, seemed as though they meant to follow the direction of the fir-tree signpost and mount into the sky, till, pausing when they reached the summit-line, the hand of man turned them to the earth again, and they came back into the valley, only all day to climb the height anew, and to climb it each time in vain.

On a June day, when the air was still and the hot sun shone unshaded on the earth, a man walked over the heath toward Heather Den. It was between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, but on the treeless heath the heat was fierce still, and the man looked worn with exhaustion as he plodded on. He had a thin, tired face ; he was tall ; his figure was spare, almost gaunt ; his hands were large, nervous, and strong.

"To call it an easy walk," he said out loud ; "it's a pilgrimage, a—a——"

He broke off, not finding any word to express the measure of his annoyance ; he spoke peevishly, as though he were irritated rather than angry.

"A devil of a way."

A voice that seemed to come from nowhere finished the stranger's sentence. He started, and stopped, and looked about him. All around the heath stretched bare and flat, destitute of concealing bush or tree. The nervous irritation on his face gave way to a puzzled look ; he knit his brows, and said in a voice that was half defiant, yet held a touch of fear :

"Who spoke ?"

"I did."

From out the thick heather, a yard or two away, a

head was raised, and two long dark eyes met the stranger's searching gaze. The eyes were set in a dark, pale face, clean-shaven, with thick dark hair about the brow, and full, firm lips that met each other close.

"I spoke. Where are you going to?"

There was a certain insolence in the calm voice that roused the other man's resentment.

"That is my own business, not yours," he answered.

"You are going to old Wichelow's. You are Anthony Dexter."

"How the devil——"

"Do I know? I know most things about here. It is not difficult; there are very few to know. You have not much further to go; when you get to the top of that little mound yonder, you will see the Den."

The head disappeared into the heather again. Anthony Dexter stood still a minute, undecided whether to attempt to continue the conversation; then he went on toward the mound that the other had spoken of.

It was not far away, nor steep. He soon reached the top, even with his lagging steps, and when he had reached it, he paused again, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked on ahead. Before him, about a mile away, lay the house he sought; only the upper part of it was visible, for the ground sank toward it, and hid the lower row of windows and the door; but the roof and the higher story were clear in all their square unpicturesqueness, and the sun shone full on the bare gray walls, on the slates, and on the squat chimneys. As Anthony Dexter stood and looked at the house, his chief feeling was one of desire to reach it, so that he might be at his journey's end; there was no room in his mind for conjecture as to what companionship or experience awaited him there; there was no presentiment of all that was about to happen to him within

those square stone walls and the lonely country about them. Worn out with excitement and hard work, he had come far away from his work to find rest, and he longed for the rest to begin. Behind him, the man lying in the heather, with his face turned up to the sunshine, and his dark eyes half closed, was thinking of the house, too, but with different thoughts and different feelings from those of Anthony Dexter.

The traveller did not pause long ; very soon he went on again, faster now, the thought of the little distance still to be covered giving the energy to cover it more quickly, and in another twenty minutes he was close to the house. As he went down the slight slope that led to it, he was struck with the intense quiet of the place ; the door was shut, and the windows, and there was no sound of life either within or without. There was no garden ; only a little flagged space divided the house from the heath ; he stood on this space and looked about him. To the right was the mound with the one fir-tree rising thin and alone ; to the left the woods ; behind, the heath that he had crossed : and the fir-tree and the woods were silent, for no breeze moved the branches or rustled in the leaves ; and the heath was silent ; and the house, with its half-drawn blinds, and its door closed to the warm June air, seemed the most silent of all.

Anthony Dexter paused with his hand on the knocker, almost afraid to disturb the silence ; then he knocked, tentatively, cautiously, making only a faint, uncertain sound. Faint as it was, it seemed loud and intrusive amid the stillness that it broke so charily ; but though it penetrated the quiet of the woods and the heath, it woke no answering sound within the house, nor response of any kind. The man, hesitating, waited a minute, then knocked again, and, as there was still no

answer, yet again. The door was still closed, and there was still no sound of footsteps or of movement ; and Anthony Dexter, his reverence for the silence swallowed up by his impatience, beat vehemently upon the unyielding wood. Then, suddenly, and quite close to him, a voice said :

“What’s your business ?”

He started and looked above and about him. The door and the windows were still shut, and he still stood alone upon the flags. But presently, to the right of the door, he became aware of a tiny opening, of the size of one brick only, covered with a grating. Behind the grating two eyes looked forth, suspicious and searching ; and when at length he met their gaze with his own gaze, the voice repeated the words it had uttered before :

“What’s your business ?”

“My business is to get into this confounded house,” answered Anthony, half puzzled and half angry.

“Ay ! but what for ?” said the voice.

“What for !”—anger was stronger than perplexity now—“what for ? when I’ve come all the way from London for no other reason than to get in, and to sleep there and to eat there for a month to come ! By Jove ! if you don’t open the door, I’ll find my way through the window.”

“Are you the man that’s to be our lodger ?” asked the voice again.

“Who else should I be, considering that no human being seems to live in this place for miles round ?”

The eyes disappeared from the grating, and presently the door was opened a hand’s breadth. Anthony Dexter, thoroughly irritated now, gave it a kick to hasten its slow opening, but it yielded only a few inches, and a grating sound told him that it was still secured by a chain.

"Where's your luggage?" said the voice.

"It's coming—in some carrier's cart or something. I don't know where it is now, and I don't care."

"And your name?" the voice went on.

"Dexter, of course—Anthony Dexter. Are you going to let me in through the door or not?"

A faint muttering was the only answer; then slowly the door was closed, while the chain was withdrawn, and in another minute Anthony Drexel entered Heather Den.

CHAPTER II.

And silence waited, as the curving wave
Waits ere it breaks in murmurs on the beach.

THE door of the house opened into a stone passage, and in the passage stood the owner of the eyes that had looked forth through the grating. He was an old man, about the middle height, very thin and very pale; his head was bald on the top, but silver-white hair hung in straggling locks some inches below the nape of his neck. His features were delicate and well cut; his eyes, of a bright blue, were restless and searching. They looked at Anthony with a penetrating gaze as he entered; they followed him as he strode a few paces along the passage.

"Which way shall I go?" asked Anthony, stopping short.

"Kitchen to right; room to left," answered the old man.

Anthony turned through a doorway to the left, and found himself in a large square room. It was sparsely furnished, yet had an air of order and comfort. The flagged floor was bare except for a strip of carpet before

the two low windows, and a square rug before the open fireplace; the whitewashed walls were purely clean. On the mantelpiece stood half a dozen pieces of old blue china, and a shelf on the opposite wall held a dozen or so more. Otherwise the walls were bare, except where a bright red curtain broke the stretch of whiteness opposite the windows.

Anthony Dexter sat down on a high-backed settle that stood between the fireplace and the window.

"Is Mr. Wichelow in?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the old man.

"I should like to speak to him."

"Speak on; I am Mr. Wichelow."

"You? I beg your pardon——"

"Why?"

"Because—well; because I thought you were somebody else."

"As you have never seen me before, I am not offended at your not knowing me."

There was a pause. The old man stood by the fireplace, waiting; his searching eyes still fixed on the newcomer, his under lip a little pushed forward.

Anthony Dexter felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. But presently the sense of injury began to revive in him, and he said:

"You give me a strange reception. Is it your habit to treat your lodgers with such scant courtesy?"

"We've never had a lodger before."

"Why do you take one now?"

"For the sake of the money."

"Ah—yes. Well, I suppose it was a foolish question. In the advertisement you say, 'A comfortable home.' Do you think——?"

"It's for you to think. This is the room we live in; you can judge if it's comfortable."

Anthony Dexter looked slowly about him. The stiff, clean room had something of quaintness in its air that pleased him; outside, the evening light lay soft upon the heath, and everywhere the quiet reigned complete. It all seemed very restful, very far away from the life that he had left; and he said softly, and rather as though speaking to himself than the old man waiting near:

"I think I will stay."

"The terms," said the old man, "are that you pay a week in advance."

Anthony half started. The peaceful stillness of the place had made him dreamy, and the prose of the old man's words broke in abruptly upon the vague sentiment of his mood.

"The terms? Oh, yes," he said; "very well."

He took two sovereigns from his pocket, and laid them down on the table.

"Guineas," said the old man; "and washing extra."

Anthony added two shillings to the gold.

"I suppose I need not pay for the washing in advance," he said, with a half-smile. "I can hardly tell what it may be—to a shirt or two."

"And you board and live with the family," the old man went on. "It was all said plainly in the letter. I suppose you kept it—the statement of terms?"

"I'm not sure." Anthony Dexter felt first in one pocket and then in another. "Yes, here it is."

He drew forth a letter as he spoke; it was written in a round, rather formal hand, and it was signed "R. Wichelow."

"Here is your letter," he said, handing it to the old man.

"It's not mine; my granddaughter wrote it. And I don't want it; I know what's in it. It's for your own satisfaction, so that there may be no disputing."

"I am not likely to dispute ; I only want to be quiet, and to be left alone. And now, if you don't mind, I should like to see my room."

The old man turned and led the way out into the passage again, and up an uncarpeted wooden staircase, to a broad landing that ran the whole length of the house, and was lighted by a square window at either end. He moved slowly along the landing toward the further window, opened a door near it, and said :

"That's your room."

It was a large room, very scantily furnished, and the boards were bare except for a strip of matting by the bed ; but everything was as scrupulously neat and clean as in the room below. There was only one ornament : on the uncovered deal table that stood beneath the small square of mirror nailed to the wall was a glass of flowers.

"It's a good room," said the old man.

"Yes," said Anthony rather doubtfully, looking at the uncarpeted floor.

"Supper at eight," said old Wichelow ; then left the room, closing the door behind him.

Anthony Dexter stood still and looked about him. Just the bed and one chair, a small, rather rickety washhand-stand, and the deal table ; that was all the furniture in the room ; and the blank wall spaces and bare boards looked somewhat comfortless.

"Well, it's a change," he said to himself at last, "a thorough change ; and, after all, that's what I want."

There were two windows in the room ; one looked toward the woods, the other on to the farmyard and the fields at the back of the house. Anthony could see the haymakers at work in a long sloping meadow that ran up the side of a hill : they worked on steadily in the subdued evening light, and presently he sat down on

the wide ledge of the window and idly watched them. By and by he turned his head from the scene outside inward toward the room, and, as his eyes wandered round it, they fell again upon the glass of flowers. He began to wonder who had put it there. Not his host, certainly ; perhaps that R. Wichelow who had written the letter, perhaps a servant, though servants didn't as a rule—well, it didn't matter ; but he took the letter out of his pocket and read again the short, stiff sentences in the careful upright hand, and the signature—"R. Wichelow." There were not many women's names beginning with R : Rachel, Rose, Rebecca——

"I hate people who only put their initials," said Anthony Dexter, with a touch of impatience.

He got up and crossed the room, and as he did so there was a knock at his door, and the door opened to let in old Wichelow's head.

"The carrier has brought your luggage," he said. "If you give him sixpence, he'll bring it up."

"Let him bring it up, and I'll give him sixpence."

In ten minutes Anthony's portmanteau and Gladstone bag were in his room, and he was left alone again. He unpacked slowly, stowing away his clothes in two little cupboards in the wall, one on either side of the fire-place ; and then, feeling very tired, he lay down on the bed to rest. The soft evening light grew paler and paler in the room ; a faint scent from the hayfield stole in through the open window, and in the great silence was that slight sense of movement, felt only in most perfect stillness, which is caused by the beating of one's own heart, but which seems like the rhythmic throb of the pulse of time.

To Anthony Dexter the absence of all sound was rest and healing ; the quiet was to him as the sweetest music ; as he lay there in the evening peace, his tired

nerves were soothed and strengthened, and he said to himself that he had done well to come to this far-away, lonely place. The glass of flowers was growing dim in its shadowed corner, and dim and uncertain in outline was the crumpled sheet of paper that lay near it, the letter that was signed "R. Wichelow."

Anthony Dexter's gaze fell direct upon the deal table, and he looked dreamily at the flowers and the little square of white. He was not consciously thinking of them; yet they were in his consciousness, vaguely, as was a half-formed picture of the girl who had touched them both. He pictured her as beautiful, not caring much whether his illusion were destroyed or not, but because it pleased him, lying there in the half-light, to think that somewhere from out the peaceful loneliness a gracious, ideal face would come and look at him, and that from out the silence a voice, full and soft, would speak.

A real voice spoke and roused him from his dreaming; but it was a voice feeble in tone and somewhat harsh in quality. Old Wichelow, knocking at the door, called to him to come to supper. He rose from the bed, and presently went downstairs to the room he had first entered, and which, as he found afterward, was called always simply "the room." The table was covered with a white cloth, and there were knives and forks laid for three; but the old man was alone when he entered, and he felt instinctively that a strong, thick-built woman who came in just after him, bearing a covered dish, was not R. Wichelow.

Old Boniface Wichelow seated himself at the table.

"Supper is ready," he said.

Anthony still stood with his hand on the back of his chair.

"Your granddaughter," he said—"is she not——"

"She has not come in."

"You do not wish to wait?"

"I never wait." The old man helped himself to food, and began to eat. "Supper comes," he said, "and supper goes. Those that don't come at the right time go without."

Anthony Dexter sat down and began to eat his supper. The fare was plentiful for two, but it would have been rather scanty for three; and Anthony felt, as the meat and bread scones disappeared, as if he were taking the absent girl's share. He tried once or twice to open a conversation; but Boniface Wichelow evidently did not care for conversation, and the short space of time that the meal lasted passed chiefly in silence. When it was over, Anthony went across to the window and looked out. The pale blue sky was quite cloudless; a beauty of peace lay upon the heath; the quiet loneliness of the outside world called to him. He waited a moment; then went into the passage, and, taking his hat, strolled out on to the little flagged space before the house. In front the heath; to the left the dark fir-tree, with a strip of pink and orange sky behind its lonely height; to the right the road, and beyond it the woods.

Anthony Dexter lingered, looking about him for a moment or two after he had lighted a cigar; then slowly he went toward the road, glanced up and down, crossed it, and sauntered into the woods.

CHAPTER III.

Then she spake : her speech was such
As not ears but heart did touch.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THE woods were silent with the silence that seemed to possess all the country-side, but across the silence came the full, sweet notes of the nightingale, beating

tremulously through the still air. Anthony Dexter paused a few minutes to listen to the lonely song, then wandered on through the deepening shade of the trees, slowly, carelessly, not heeding the direction in which he went, delighting in the absence of those many sounds of rumbling wheels, barrel-organs, brass bands, and human voices, which, preying on his strained nerves, had at last become unbearable, and made flight from them a necessity.

On and on, still very slowly ; even the gray of the evening light was rest ; and his weary body forgot its weariness as his spirit inhaled and rejoiced in the great quiet that lay over all. Great and unbroken, or it had seemed so till now. He could not tell when first the silence had ceased to be absolute, when first the sound that moved so gently toward him had struck upon his ear ; the stillness had been broken so softly that the break had been hardly perceptible ; but the moment that brought him the consciousness of the break, brought him the knowledge that, for some moments before that consciousness had been active, there had floated through the quiet the sound that he heard distinctly now—the sound of a sad melody, sung by a pure, full voice.

He paused and listened ; and the sound rose suddenly, swelled by other voices, harsher and less true than the voice that had gone before ; then sank again, and there was a moment's silence before the single strain broke forth once more. Anthony Dexter moved on, led by the sound ; and the sound grew stronger as he moved ; and again came the burst of voices, raised in what the plaintive melody made a cry of longing or of prayer. Still forward, more quickly ; the sound was very near him now ; the singer must be—— Suddenly there was a break in the woods ; the thick brushwood and under-

growth that had hidden the onlook ceased ; and Anthony Dexter found himself on the borders of an open space, a clearing in the midst of the thick-growing, motionless trees. He stopped short, and looked, and listened. In the open space was gathered a company of men and women, in number about twenty ; some were young and upright, but most were bowed and bent with age, or hard work, or the two together ; and the men, with their smock-frocks or shirts open at the neck, and the women with their wide-brimmed hats or large cotton bonnets, all held rakes or pitchforks as they stood. Some of the faces were dull and heavy ; some were only very weary ; some were both ; here and there a young face showed that the joy of living was not yet quenched in finding the means to live. They were grouped, some leaning on their rakes or pitchforks as they stood, round a central figure ; in their midst was a young girl, tall, full-busted, strong, dressed in a scanty, clinging gown of pale lilac cotton, and holding in one hand a sun-bonnet of the same material and colour as her dress. Her face was turned toward Anthony ; slightly raised, the eyes looking upward to the sky, it was lighted by a glow of exultation as she sang in the pure voice that he had heard afar off. The words that she sang were a kind of doggerel verse :

“ Sorrow and toil through all the weary day,
Sorrow and toil, and neither let nor stay,
Sorrow and toil till life shall pass away ; ”

and the voices of the men and women standing round joined in quavering and uncertain, harsh, strong, true and false, with the girl's voice, as it rose and trilled in the refrain :

“ But oh for the rest beyond ! ”

The air of the song was quaint, and wild, and plaintive ; it was written in the major key, yet had a minor sadness in it ; or perhaps the minor note was in the worn faces of the men and women, as they stood with eyes fixed on the singer in their midst, or joined in the cry of longing for a rest which could only lie beyond the daily life they knew. The girl sang on :

“ Sorrow and toil, and sin and passion rife,
Satan at hand to vex us in the strife,
No hope of rest through all this struggling life ; ”

and again the chorus swelled :

“ But oh for the rest beyond ! ”

The singer paused a moment, and glanced at the group around her. “ Sing with me, dear friends,” she said, then raised her voice and started the next verse. And now, here and there, a voice joined in with the girl’s voice, feeble and uncertain, jarring on the pureness of her notes, dying away again, and leaving her to sing a few bars alone, till in the last line many voices joined, with the upward and downward drag from note to note common to the untaught in music :

“ Sorrow and toil and many bitter tears.
Quick-dying hopes and ever-living fears,
Hearts tired with beating all the weary years :
But oh for the rest beyond ! ”

The wail of the chorus, full, longing, with a ring in it that came from the half-conscious bitterness in the hearts of the singers, died away. The girl turned her eyes from the sky to the people around her.

“ It is late,” she said ; “ the light will soon be gone. Go home and rest ; the Lord will keep you through the night, and give you strength for to-morrow’s work.”

She stood, with her arms folded, the sun-bonnet dangling from one finger, while the people slowly, and in various directions, passed out of the open space. The women gave little bobbing courtesies and the men touched their hats before they went, and the girl returned their salutations gravely, with a slow bend of the head.

Anthony Dexter drew back into the undergrowth : some of the company passed along the path by which he had come, and he did not wish to be seen ; but when the figures had disappeared amongst the trees, he stepped forward again, so that he could see into the cleared space. The girl still stood there alone ; her arms were still folded, her face was dim in the lessening light ; but her eyes seemed to look, calm and steadfast, in amongst the trees to the spot where Anthony waited and watched her. She moved a few paces forward, and Anthony moved too, rustling the leaves purposely as he pushed his way on to the path. She stopped a moment when she heard the rustling, and then came on again, saying in the full, low voice that had wished the people good-night :

"Is that you, Micah? Are you too tired to get home?"

"It is not Micah," said Anthony Dexter. "It is I, a stranger."

He stepped out into the cleared space. He was close to her.

"Tell me," he said, "who you are."

The exaltation was still alight in her face, and there was a thrill of exaltation in her voice as she answered him.

"I am the servant of the Lord," she said.

The man could only look at her. Her face was very beautiful in the gray light ; and inscrutable. There was subtlety behind the exaltation ; it lay in the curves

of the mouth, and in the eyes, drooping slightly at the corners ; and there was passionate feeling. The face interested him, moved him, affected him strangely.

"Tell me," he said eagerly, and with a trembling dread of disappointment in the answer, "are you R. Wichelow ?"

"I am Rhoda Wichelow," she answered.

"Rhoda ! Of course," he said—"of course that is the name."

"Why of course ?"

The exaltation was gone from her face ; now the lips curled slightly as she spoke.

"Because you could have no other name. Rhoda ! It suits you absolutely. There was never a Rhoda in the world but you."

"I am glad the name pleases you," she said coldly. "And now I must go home."

"I am your lodger," said Anthony Dexter, "and I must go home too. May I walk with you ?"

"If you will."

The girl strode on, and he followed her. The path was narrow, and he could not have walked beside her unless she had chosen to tread on the extreme edge of it, and she did not choose ; she walked in the middle, and she did not turn nor speak. On through the woods they went ; the dry twigs cracked beneath their feet ; otherwise the silence was unbroken. Curiosity and a strong desire to hear her speak again made Anthony venture upon a question at last.

"Those people," he said, "that were with you just now, who are they ? Labourers—village people, I suppose ?"

"They work for my grandfather," the girl answered. "Just now it is the haymaking, and they are haymakers for the time."

"And you—do you sing like that every night?"

"When it is fine."

"It is very good of you."

"Good?" The girl stopped suddenly and turned upon him. "Do you call that good? All day they work, from the early morning to the dusk—and longer if there is work that must be done; there is no room in their lives for anything but work, and work, and work. They have no time to think of their souls, or the life of souls; they have no time to think of anything but just how to toil on and on from day to day. And if in the summer evenings, when the light lingers, they will come sometimes and think for a little while of the brightness beyond the dull, daily life; and if they let the longing and the weariness of their hearts come out in the songs we sing, is it goodness to be with them for half an hour and to give them what help I can? You call it good. It is not good; it is human, that is all."

She turned and walked on again, and Anthony Dexter followed her in silence, not knowing what to say. She did not speak till they had passed out of the woods; then, before crossing the road, she stopped again and turned her face to him once more.

"It will not be very comfortable for you at Heather Den," she said.

"I think it will—quite comfortable enough."

"You do not know, but I know. I wrote to you when you answered the advertisement, and I said what my grandfather told me to say; but I also tried to make the terms seem as disagreeable as I could, so that you should not come from London all this way."

"Why did you not want me to come?"

"I knew you would not stay."

"I think I shall stay."

"You will not have the sort of food you are used to."

The girl's voice became almost defiant and her face flushed slightly. "You will hardly have enough. And then," she went on hurriedly, before Anthony could speak, "it is all so bare and poor."

"But it is beautifully clean," said Anthony, and felt when he had said it that it was a ridiculous thing to say.

Rhoda Wichelow gave a little scornful laugh.

"Oh, yes, it is clean," she said.

Then she walked on across the road and into the house, and Anthony Dexter followed her.

CHAPTER IV.

There is nothing makes a man suspect much more than to know little.—*LORD BACON.*

It was dark in the passage, and almost dark in the room. Pale gleams of light came through the small-paned windows, and showed dimly the shrunken form of old Boniface Wichelow crouching on the settle.

"Good-evening, grandfather," said Rhoda Wichelow.

"Why are you so late?" was all the old man answered.

"The work went on till late this evening. You had said that the hay must all be turned in the hill meadow before it stopped."

"But you could have come in in time for supper—and the lodger here."

"You know I never stop work till the people stop."

"Always thwarting and self-willed," the old man muttered—"always her own way." Then louder he said, "Supper is over long ago. You know my rule?"

"Yes. Sally will make me some gruel; it is all I want."

Boniface Wichelow got down from the settle and came toward the girl.

"Not with milk," he said ; "by Jehovah, you shall not have milk ! If you don't come and eat at the right time, you shall not have extra food cooked at double the cost."

The girl made no reply, but walked slowly out of the room, and Anthony Dexter stood hesitating and uncomfortable, not knowing what to do. But in a minute Rhoda returned, bearing a lamp.

"It is hardly dark yet," said old Wichelow ; "we do not want a light just now."

"Other people do not care for such a long twilight as you do, grandfather. Mr."—Rhoda turned to Anthony—"Mr. Dexter would like a light."

She looked at him as if for an answer.

"Yes," he said, more for the sake of agreeing with her, of appearing to take her part, than because he really cared much whether the room were light or dark.

Rhoda put the lamp on the table, and once more left the room. When she had gone, the old man came close to Anthony.

"What are you going to do ?" he asked.

"I don't know—except to sit down." Anthony drew a chair to the table as he spoke, and seated himself.

"And talk," said Boniface Wichelow. "It is a very good time to talk—the evening." He came and put his face close to Anthony's face. "You do not want a light, eh ?" he said—"not to talk by ?"

Before Anthony could answer he had turned out the lamp. In the first minutes the darkness seemed complete, but gradually the last wan gleams of daylight made themselves felt, showing dimly the table and chairs and the large black mass of the settle. There

was no sign of old Wichelow, and all was so silent that Anthony began to think he must have left the room.

"Are you there, Mr. Wichelow?" he said at last.

"Yes."

The answer, in the old man's feeble, rather high voice, came from the settle, and Anthony perceived that he must have taken up his former position there. Nothing was added to the "Yes," and the minutes went by, darker and darker, but always in silence.

Anthony Dexter began to feel ill at ease; the stillness that had been so sweet a little while since became oppressive now; it seemed to possess a positive quality that had something deathlike in it; and the fancy grew upon him that the shrewd, searching gaze of the crouching figure on the settle was strong enough to penetrate the darkness, and that the eyes that had looked at him through the grating were fixed upon and saw him now. He told himself that the fancy was a ridiculous one, and tried to shake it off; yet it would not go; it strengthened into a conviction and dominated him. He was tired, out of health, lacking in nervous force; and no doubt the condition of his body tended to the development of the mental state in which he found himself; yet afterward, when his body grew strong again and his nervous energy revived, there was never an occasion, of all the many occasions on which it happened, that he was alone with old Boniface Wichelow, when he was not conscious of something of the same sensation he felt that evening; and the sensation was always stronger in proportion as the light was less. It is hardly strange that it should have been so. The influence of a strong spirit makes itself felt even amidst the constant distractions of everyday life; and when these distractions are in suspense, when darkness blinds the eye and silence starves the ear, it is natural, rather

than unnatural, that the soul of a man should dominate his surroundings, and that a strong spirit should impress itself upon a spirit less strong.

The windows faded gradually from the wall ; the night rose up behind them and made itself one with the darkness within the room ; and still the silence endured, and still Anthony Dexter sat motionless, and the feeling grew stronger that through the darkness the eyes of old Boniface Wichelow pierced with certain sight, and held him in bondage with a force he could not combat. He did not know what length of time had passed, when, while still there was no sound within the room, outside the house came a sound which, as it broke the heavy silence that pressed upon him with paralyzing weight, brought with it a sense, hardly so much of relief as of salvation.

A whistle, low and clear, rose softly through the stillness of the summer night : it was repeated once and again, and then a voice, a man's voice, spoke. Anthony Dexter could not hear the words it said ; but he heard the answer, and he knew the voice that answered, the same voice, low but full, that had spoken in the woods.

"I could not have come to you before," it said.

In the strange state of his consciousness, it seemed to Anthony that it spoke to him, even while he knew it was not so ; and it seemed to him that this was the voice he had dreamed of in his waking dream in the room upstairs, when the twilight had shown him dimly the glass of flowers plucked by an unknown hand. "I could not come to you before," it said : but it had come forth at last out of the silence, as he had dreamed it would, and he was content.

Outside the voices went on talking in low tones. Anthony heard no more words that were said, but while the voices spoke he was freed from the spell which the

unseen presence of Boniface Wichelow had exercised upon him in silence. After a time they ceased, and he was left alone again in the still darkness ; and again the subtle influence that took its rise from the silent figure on the settle began to lay hold on him. But not for long : after a little space of the black, dead silence the door of the room was opened, and someone entered. Anthony could not see who it was, but he felt that it was Rhoda Wichelow, and in a moment she spoke.

"You are in the dark," she said ; and as no answer came, "Grandfather, why did you put out the lamp?" she went on.

As she spoke, she moved forward through the darkness to the table by which Anthony sat ; her dress brushed him as she passed. She struck a match, and once more there was light in the room, and Anthony Dexter awoke from his nightmare. Rhoda repeated her question.

"Why did you put out the lamp, grandfather?"

The old man, crouching on the settle, screwed up his eyes as though the light hurt them.

"We did not want a light to talk by," he said.

He rose from the settle, crossed the room, and passed out of the door.

"Did he talk?" asked Rhoda Wichelow.

"No."

The girl stood with her two hands on the table, her head thrown slightly back, looking over the lamp, over Anthony's head, as he sat, to something on the opposite wall—or beyond the wall ; the light came in an upward stream, showing distinctly the full, round throat, the firm chin, and the delicate nostrils, and leaving the upper part of the face in shadow. As Anthony watched her face, and the expression of it, he was reminded of a picture that hung in his room at home, a drawing of a

woman's head and bust. It was copied from a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, and it had always fascinated and puzzled him by the mystery of the woman's face. The spirit of the Renaissance looked forth from it : beauty, the pride of life, passion, subtility, daring ; all the splendour and all the evil of an aroused humanity, triumphant in its own strength and its own glory. And in this half-lighted face he seemed to see something of the same inscrutability that fascinated him in the picture face, and something of the same strong capabilities. He did not ask himself whether the capabilities were for good or for evil ; he did not reflect that strength for the one means strength for the other ; and that it is not in capabilities but in the control or fostering of them that sin or holiness gathers the force of victory ; he only felt instinctively that the depths and heights of a human soul showed dimly in the upturned face before him, and that an undeveloped nature awaited development.

It was only a minute that Rhoda Wichelow stood looking at something that was not in the room ; presently there were slow steps in the stone passage, and old Boniface returned. He came close to his granddaughter, and laid his hand on her arm with a clenching grip.

"Where is Sally?" he said.

"She has gone to bed."

"The milk has gone from the pan in the larder. If she has given it to you, I——"

"She did not give it to me ; I took it."

The old man's face darkened ; the dormant evil in it awoke ; he raised his hand. Anthony Dexter got up from his seat, but Rhoda waved him back ; with her disengaged hand she held her grandfather's hand and lowered it to his side again.

"I took no more than I needed," she said. "I work

for you all day long ; I work as hard or harder than the people you hire—and God knows they work hard enough ; I earn, and more than earn, the food I eat, and I must have what my strength needs. If it failed me, or if I were to leave you, you know that I should be a loss to you.”

Boniface Wichelow’s expression changed as she spoke ; there was a dim fear in his eyes, and a certain deprecation in his voice as he answered her.

“But why not come in to supper ?” he said. “It costs so much less—all to eat together.”

“I have told you why I did not come in to supper,” Rhoda said.

The old man made no reply, but loosened his grip on her arm and went across the room to the settle. But when he reached it he turned and came back to her.

“You can do as you like,” he said ; “it doesn’t matter about the milk, Rhody.”

The girl did not answer ; she was looking away from him ; and to attract her attention he put his hand upon her arm again. He touched it very gently, but Anthony could see that she winced.

“Very well, grandfather,” she said, and she spoke quite gently. “I hear.”

“And you will not leave me, Rhody—not just yet ?”

“Not just yet,” she answered.

The old man stood for a minute in silence, then : “It is late,” he said—“time for bed. You must be tired, Mr. Dexter.”

“Yes, I am quite ready to go to bed.”

“Then we will go up. Are you coming, Rhody ?”

“No.”

The girl moved from the table across to the red curtain on the wall. She stopped when she reached it.

“Good-night,” she said ; and then she disappeared

behind the curtain, and there was the sound of a door that was opened and closed.

Anthony followed old Wichelow upstairs ; but as he went he longed to turn back, to enter the room, to pull aside the curtain, and to see what lay beyond it. Left alone in his own room, and sitting down on the one chair to think over the curious evening he had passed, he gradually became conscious of the sound of a voice speaking ; dimly and uncertainly his ear caught the sound ; as he listened, he became more and more convinced that it came up from the room below. He set himself to consider the position of his own room, and by and by the thought that had begun in a hope strengthened into a certainty ; he felt sure that it lay over the room behind the curtain, and that it was Rhoda Wichelow's voice that came to him with such vague sound.

He opened the door and listened ; the house was quite quiet. He took off his boots, and went cautiously along the landing and down the staircase, and then, still more cautiously, grouped his way along the passage and into the room.

Yes, he had been right ; it was Rhoda's voice that he had heard ; it was her voice certainly that he heard now. He felt with his hand carefully along the wall till he reached the curtain ; then he stopped and listened. Her voice came out to him ; he could hear the words she said :

“ O Lord, save Thy people.

“ And bless Thine inheritance.

“ O Lord, let Thy mercy be showed upon us.

“ As we do put our trust in Thee.”

As he listened a sudden sense of shame took hold upon him ; he felt that he had no right to steal down and play the spy upon this girl who thought herself alone,

that the curiosity that led him to do it was mean and contemptible ; and he began to move back slowly along the wall. But in the same moment that he stirred the voice ceased, and in another instant he heard the uplifting of a latch and the rustle of a curtain.

With a few bold steps he strode away from the wall out into the room, thus leaving a free passage from the curtain to the door ; and with his heart beating so violently that he feared lest she should hear it beat, he waited for Rhoda Wichelow to pass. Her footsteps sounded distinctly on the bare stone floor ; she came on a few steps and then stopped, and Anthony could hear that she breathed quickly. He held his own breath and waited, motionless, fearing every moment to hear her voice, scornful and accusing. But after a pause she moved on, and her footsteps died gradually away. Anthony waited a long time before he ventured to climb the stairs and find his way back to his own room.

CHAPTER V.

How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

ANTHONY DEXTER passed a restless night. The upturned face of Rhoda Wichelow, with the upper part flooded by the lamplight and the lower part in shadow, and the face of her grandfather, with its shrewd, searching eyes, were with him in his dreams and during the frequent intervals of wakefulness that broke the night. He was weary and unrefreshed when the dawn, breaking far off across the heath, gathered strength enough

to enter and fill the room, and reveal to him its bare unfamiliarity. Only the glass of flowers, shadowy in its corner, had something familiar and friendly in its air, and it must have been placed there—he felt sure of it now—by Rhoda Wichelow. He rose and moved the table close to his bed ; then lying down again, fell at last, in the growing daylight, into a sleep that brought him forgetfulness and rest.

The sunlight was full on the roofs of the farm buildings and on the sloping fields beyond, when he again awoke, aroused by a persistent knocking at the door.

“Yes,” he called—“yes. What is it?”

“The breakfast and the master’s ready,” said a voice, “and he says you’d best be quick if you want any.”

About half an hour later Anthony entered the room. Old Wichelow had finished his breakfast and gone, and Rhoda was coming toward the door as he went in.

“Are you going?” he asked, disappointment strong in his face and voice.

“Yes.” She stopped for a minute. “Your breakfast is cold, but I cannot help it.”

She had on the large calico bonnet she had worn on the evening before ; her sleeves were turned back above the elbows. On the right arm, just above the wrist, was a bruise, or, rather, there were several bruises, four distinct blue marks. Anthony saw the marks.

“Your arm,” he said ; “is it——”

He stopped as he raised his eyes to the girl’s face ; there was something in it that told him to stop. She put her hand quickly over the bruised place, as though to hide it.

“Never mind my arm,” she said ; and she went past him into the passage, and through the outer door, out of the house.

Anthony turned to the breakfast-table. Cold por-

ridge, cold, weak tea, scones, bread-and-butter ; that was all the breakfast. He understood why Rhoda had said to him, "You will not stay." Just for a minute he began to think she had spoken the truth ; he was fastidious about his eating, and the cold food was not tempting. Then the charm of the girl's face grew strong again ; the story in it, past or to come—and he felt that the chief part of it was still to come—was a story that he longed to know, and he made up his mind that he would stay and read it. He took a little of the weak tea, and ate some bread-and-butter, and then went out on to the heath. The summer morning was still soft with youth ; there was a balmy freshness in the air, and everywhere a sense of dreamy contentment, a consciousness of the long, sweet day to follow. The silence was broken by the clucking of hens in the farmyard, by the songs of birds, by the distant murmur of voices in the hayfield ; but none of these sounds jarred upon Anthony's weary ears ; rather did they seem gentle and soothing to him as they faintly stirred the stillness. He lay down in the heather not far from the house, and, looking up at the cloudless sky above, abandoned himself to the state of dreamy thought which had shadowed him since his arrival at Heather Den.

He lay there till the sun's increasing strength became greater than was comfortable, and then, without consciously determining whither he would go, he wandered into the wood, and took the path he had trod the evening before. The trees were still motionless, but the gray enchantment that had hung from the quiet branches was gone now ; instead was a deep, dark shade, with gleams of scattered sunlight ; and many songs of many birds replaced the nightingale's single notes. He wandered on, screened from the blazing sun, enjoying the beauty and the peace around him with

lazy, sensuous enjoyment, till the influence of the place entered into and possessed him, as in Andrew Marvell's poem,

" Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade."

The path led direct to the cleared space where Rhoda Wichelow had sung to the people ; almost, as he drew near to it, he expected to hear the sound of her singing. And yet the strain, with its burden of sadness, was not in keeping with the strong, full light of the noonday ; it belonged rather to the waning gray of dusk ; as he went on, he felt with each step that the scene of the evening before was impossible now ; a different spirit seemed to reign in and sway the woods.

A different spirit, a different scene, a different face ; truly it was so. As Anthony paused, as he had paused before, and looked through thick-leaved branches into the space beyond, he saw that it was not quite empty : on a felled trunk a man sat, whittling a stick. Anthony knew the face, with its long eyes and its crown of black hair ; it was the face that had been raised from out the heather as he had passed across the heath on his way to Heather Den. He had seen it only cursorily, indistinctly, then ; he could see it plainly now. He stopped and observed it. A clean-shaven face, there was nothing to hide the shape and lines of the mouth, or the contour of the chin ; he could mark the lips, the upper one thin, the lower one rather full, and the firm pressure of the two together ; he could mark the strength of the jaw, the determination of the lines about the nostrils, and the boldness of the brow. Anthony Dexter was not a physiognomist, and he did not attempt to draw the character of the man from his features ; he felt rather than inferred the power of the face before him, and in

the power was something that repelled him. As he looked, the man glanced up.

"Anyone coming?" he said.

He still whittled away at the stick, but his dark eyes looked round the circle of trees and then rested near the spot where Anthony stood. It seemed to Anthony that they suspected his presence there, and instinctively he drew back further into the wood, and then cautiously found his way into the path again and went back toward Heather Den. For some reason, which he did not attempt to explain to himself, which he could not even define, he shrank from another interview with the owner of the dark, strange face, and his return through the woods had in it something of the nature of flight.

All the day he hardly saw Rhoda Wichelow. She came in at dinner time and sat down at table with him and old Boniface; but the meal was quickly over, she spoke very little during its course, and as soon as it was ended she returned to the hayfield. During the afternoon Anthony Dexter ventured to follow her there. He took a book with him, and at first sat down at some distance from where she was working and watched her while he pretended to read. She was much taller than any of the women, taller than many of the bent, stunted men: the pose of her figure, as she moved from one position to another, was beautiful in its easy grace; he could not see her face, shaded by the wide frill of her bonnet. For some time he watched her, at first with quick, continual glances from the page he did not read, afterward with the book lying closed by his side; till at last the strong interest with which she inspired him, an interest composed of many feelings, of which puzzled curiosity was perhaps the strongest, caused him to rise from his lounging position in the shade of a tree, and to approach her as she stood raking hay into a little heap.

She looked up for a moment as he drew near, but went on with her work without appearing to notice him.

"Do you never speak?" he asked at last, piqued by her indifferent silence.

"Never—or very seldom, when I am at work."

He waited a minute, observing the face that would not reveal to him what lay behind it. Then he said:

"May I work too?"

"If you like." She raised her eyes and looked at him with a swift glance. "No," she added; "you are not strong enough."

There was a touch of contempt in her voice. Anthony Dexter winced under it.

"You admire strength?" he said.

"Oh, yes."

"And you despise weakness?"

"No, I pity it."

There was a moment's silence.

"I think," said Anthony, "that I used the right word, after all; despise is nearer the truth."

"No. All these people"—she gave a little wave of her hand—"all these people are weak, and I pity them."

"The people—yes; but me?"

"Oh, you? I am not concerned with you; you do not belong to my life."

"I do," Anthony said quickly, "for a time, at any rate; so long as I live in your house, and am your lodger."

She half smiled, and there was a shadow of laughter in her eyes.

"Ah! that's just it; you lodge there, but you do not live in it."

"But I may; it might happen that I became a part

of your life." He spoke almost defiantly. "How do you know?"

"I do not know, of course?"

She slightly raised her shoulders; the movement seemed to imply that the possibility he had spoken of was indifferent to her. He turned away; he had meant to amuse himself by the indulgence of his curiosity, and she had made him angry. But after taking a few steps he came back to her again.

"Do you know," he said, with a longing to raise himself in her eyes—"do you know that it is hard work that has made me ill and weak?"

She paused in her task and looked at him; there was a quickened interest in her face.

"What kind of work?" she said.

"Do you care to know?"

"Yes."

"Then I will tell you," he answered, "but not now. I will tell you some day, when you, too, will let me know something about yourself."

"Ah!" she said. Her eyes rested on him for a quarter of a minute; there was a little wonder in them, a little inquiry, and the unfathomable inward look of the pictured eyes in his room in London; then she turned away from him, saying:

"You must not talk to me any more, please. I have my work to do."

She moved away to a group of haymakers at a little distance, and Anthony Dexter went slowly out of the field, feeling himself dismissed.

CHAPTER VI.

The region of music which is the hidden workshop of the soul.—GEORGE MACDONALD.

It was nearly -supper time, and there was no sign either of Rhoda or of Boniface Wichelow. Anthony Dexter sat in the room looking listlessly out of the window. The silence was deepening about the house as the dusk drew on ; he began to feel very lonely. Presently came a distant clattering of knives and plates : it drew nearer, and Sally entered with a loaded tray.

"Where is Mr. Wichelow?" asked Anthony.

"Gone to Breybridge. Him allus goes of a Saturday."

"Is it far?"

"More'n six mile."

"He drives, I suppose?"

Anthony spoke rather for the sake of continuing the conversation than to gain information ; the house seemed very lonely.

"Drive—him drive? Lor' bless you no! Walks."

"All that way? I shouldn't have thought he could have done it."

"Oh, yes ; him can do it—with time."

"He'll be back in time for supper, I suppose?"

"Not afore ten o'clock. Then it'll be a drop of water gruel with a smell of whiskey in it—'tish't more'n enough to smell it by, and nobody don't know where he keeps it."

"And what does he go all that way for, pray?"

The woman grinned and chuckled.

"A half-ounce of baccy. Him smokes it of a Sunday."

"But surely"—Anthony began to be interested—"surely he could get tobacco nearer than Breybridge? There must be a shop of some kind—a village."

Again the woman grinned.

"It's a halfpenny cheaper at Breybridge nor what it is anywhere else," she said. She had finished laying the table now, and went over to the door; there she paused. "Oh!" she said, with concentrated vehemence, "him's close."

She passed through the doorway, but Anthony called her back.

"Tell me," he said, "will Miss Wichelow come in to supper?"

"Likely," said the woman, "being Saturday."

And then again she left the room.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Rhoda passed the window and entered the house. She ran quickly upstairs, and was down in time to help Sally to bring in the supper.

"Your grandfather is out," said Anthony.

"Yes, he is always out at supper time on Saturdays."

"And you—are you always in on Saturdays?"

"Yes; we do not work overtime to-day."

"In most places people stop work early on Saturdays."

"Not here."

"I almost wonder," said Anthony suddenly, after a moment's thought—"I almost wonder that anybody works for your grandfather."

"There are so few people to work for," Rhoda answered, "and so many who want to work."

There was a pause, then Anthony said:

"Did you sing to-night?"

"Yes." She looked at him across the table. "You did not come."

"Did you expect me?"

"No." She was still looking at him. "And yet," she said, "I thought perhaps you would."

"I was afraid to come. I knew"—he paused—"I knew I was in disgrace."

Rhoda made no reply, but bent her eyes again. Presently she asked :

"Was that why you didn't come?"

"Of course."

"You would have come but for that?"

"Of course," he repeated.

"Then you liked it?"

"What?"

"The song—the singing."

She spoke so gravely that he answered gravely too, almost in spite of himself.

"Yes."

Her eyes met his with the same inscrutable look they had worn in the wood.

"Ah!" she said softly, "I thought so."

"I don't mean," said Anthony, "that I liked to listen to those people you"—he smiled—"you pity."

"No, no," she said half impatiently, "of course not. But me—you liked to hear me?"

"Yes."

She gave a little sigh as of contentment, but said nothing; and presently, the meal being over, she rose and began to clear the table. Anthony stood by the window and watched her as she moved to and fro. Was she very vain? he thought, and could not answer the question; he could answer none of the questions that he asked himself about her; and his ignorance made her the more interesting.

When the table was cleared, Rhoda brought in the lamp, and having put it down :

"Have you any books?" she said—"anything to amuse yourself with?"

"I have some books, but they do not amuse me."

Rhoda had moved away from the table as she spoke, toward the red curtain on the wall; she had reached it now, and she turned and said:

"I am going in here."

She stood with her back to the curtain; her right hand, raised above her head, grasped one of its folds; her head was slightly thrown back, so that her eyes had a downward glance as they looked at Anthony across the room. The red of the curtain made a brilliant background for the beautiful face and figure; the subtle charm of her expression seemed to grow as she waited; Anthony Dexter looked at her with a quicker beating of the heart.

She stood for a moment in silence; then she said: "Will you come?"

Without a word he rose, and came quickly toward her. She waved him back.

"Bring the lamp," she said.

He turned and did her bidding; and then, while she held the curtain aside, he passed through an open doorway in the wall into an inner room. Rhoda dropped the curtain, followed him, and closed the door.

The room was a small one; the floor was uncarpeted, the walls unpapered, as in the other rooms in the house, but there was no impression of the bareness that characterized those other rooms. The walls were a pale yellow; on the stone flags before the fireplace was a large thick rug of many colors, that had been brilliant once, but were faded into softness now; on the table that stood in the corner was a cloth of the same vivid red that hid the entrance from the outer room. Over the mantelpiece hung a bookcase on which were a few

volumes : a Bible, a Church Service, Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living," Law's "Serious Call," and an odd volume of Carlyle's "French Revolution" ; opposite the wall was a piano, open, and on the music slide a book of revival hymns.

Anthony put the lamp down on the table, and looked about him.

"This is your room ?" he said—"yours only ?"

"Yes."

Her eyes were on the piano. He followed her glance.

"Do you play on that ?"

"Not often ; only to learn the tunes by."

He went over to the instrument and examined it.

"It is old," he said.

"It belonged to my mother. She brought it here long ago."

"She did not teach you to play it ?"

"Yes, but I do not care to play it ; it creaks."

Anthony Dexter sat down and struck a few cords on the yellow notes.

"It has been good once," he said. "It creaks now a little, as you say, but it was good once."

She answered him with a question :

"You are a musician ?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," she said. There was a kind of triumph in her eyes.

"Why ?"

"I dreamed it." She paused a moment, her triumphant eyes still fixed upon him. "Did you see," she said, "the glass of flowers on the table in your room ?"

"Yes. Was it you——"

"I put them there, not for you, the lodger, but for the musician of my dream."

"Am I he ?"

She did not answer him, but moved a few paces away. The light was behind her now, and he could not see the look on her face. He played a few bars of a melody and stopped.

"Play on," she said.

Anthony rose from his seat.

"May I have the lamp nearer to me?" he asked.

"As you like."

He took the lamp and placed it near the piano. He did not want more light, but he wanted the light so placed that it should fall upon her face.

"You do not care to sit down?" he said.

"No; I like to stand."

She went over to the mantelpiece and leaned against it; she waited, looking toward him, while he opened the top of the instrument and tried the pedals. Then he sat down and began to play.

He played one of Bach's preludes; the movement was adagio; it was full of majesty, of pure, severe beauty. The girl stood motionless while he played. Looking back at her over his shoulder, he could see that on her face was the same look of exaltation that it had worn when she sang in the woods; her hands were clasped, her eyes had a faint wonder in them.

He paused and she did not move: he ran through a few modulations, and glided into a nocturne of Chopin's in a minor key. The changing time, the restless striving, the modern spirit of the music, touched something in Rhoda Wichelow's spirit that breathed a change upon her face. A vague excitement mingled with the exaltation of her look; her nostrils dilated, her curving lips parted, the wonder in her eyes became an eager expectation. He played on, and the clasped hands were loosened; one was half raised, and one foot stepped half a pace before its fellow; but she did not actually

move forward ; she stood, while the complaining music filled the room, still with her head a little thrown back, as if in the act to advance, but yet was motionless.

The music ceased, and Anthony Dexter looked back at her again. She still stood in the attitude that promised immediate movement, and still she did not move ; her face, with its curving, quivering lips and waiting eyes, held all the mystery of Leonardo's face. When he paused she gave a little sigh, but waited motionless, as though listening for sounds that were yet to come. Still watching her, he put his hands upon the keys again and played Wagner.

As the strange, new harmonies struck upon her ear, the girl's face changed again ; the exaltation died quite away ; instead came a look more human, more passionate, more complex. Her head, instead of being thrown back, was bent now—toward the player ; the figure poised ready for movement moved at last. She took a step forward. Anthony played on, played the music, pagan, bewildering, maddening, that the world heard first when Wagner began to write : and the strange beauty of it, the evil and the power that are in it, the sad sweep that pines through the whirl of it, the strains of sweet, lost hope that wail in it, stirred the girl's being, aroused, mastered, overwhelmed it, and led her trembling and helpless toward the man who revealed it to her.

The instrument he played on was old, inadequate, creaking, as Rhoda had said ; only a great musician could have made it produce the sounds he brought forth from it that night ; only a great power in the player could have availed to show anything of the power of the music.

He played, and the girl came nearer to him ; the music swelled and triumphed through the room, and she came nearer yet. He looked back at her, and saw

the momentous face, with the dawn of new feeling in it ; and the spirit of the music was in Anthony, too ; and he played on, and she came nearer still.

She stood close behind him now ; her quick breath brushed him as it came ; her hand almost touched his shoulder ; her face bent over him. A moment she stood so, bending, almost suppliant, drawn to him, or the music in him, by some power that was stronger than her will ; then suddenly she stepped back, and rose up to the fulness of her height, and stretched her right arm out, straight and firm.

“ Stop ! ” she said.

And Anthony Dexter, obeying instinctively the command in her voice and attitude, did as he was bid, stopped in the crash of a cord, and let his hands slip from the keys ; and the music ceased suddenly, with jagged, broken notes ; and the silence of the lonely heath asserted its strength again, and entered and filled the room. The glow of active emotion was gone from Rhoda's face ; she was very white and she trembled. After a minute her lips moved, and she spoke in a whisper.

“ Is that music ? ”

“ Yes.”

Anthony spoke in a whisper too, and then again there was silence. It was broken by a sound from outside, a sharp tapping on the window-pane ; the sash was thrown up quickly, and a face showed itself, looking forward into the light out of the darkness behind. Anthony knew the face ; it had greeted him on the heath : he had observed it in the wood. Rhoda looked round at it, and said :

“ It's Paul.”

CHAPTER VII.

God Cupid's shaft, like Destiny,
Doth either good or ill decree.

FULKE GREVILLE.

"SHALL I come in this way?" said the voice at the window.

"No," Rhoda answered; "go round to the front."

The face remained stationary for half a minute, looking into the room; then it drew back into the darkness and disappeared. Rhoda turned to Anthony.

"Will you take the lamp back?"

He obeyed her without speaking. She shut down the window, waited alone for a little space, and then followed him.

There was a knocking at the outer door. Rhoda went into the passage, and opened it. Anthony could hear the talking of low voices, and then she and the man whose face he already knew came back to the room together.

"This is Paul Garnet," said Rhoda.

She stood by the newcomer as she spoke; she looked very fair, much fairer than she really was, in contrast with his dark face. They were two strange faces; his, inscrutable with a conscious, deliberate inscrutability, as though it said: I hide the soul behind me; hers, subtle, mysterious with possibilities, as though the soul looked through and said: I know not what I am, nor what I may be; I have yet to awake.

"Mr. Dexter and I have met before," said Paul Garnet.

His address and manner of speech were those of a gentleman; yet there was still a trace, a very faint trace, of the covert insolence with which he had spoken on the heath.

Anthony bowed without speaking.

"I startled Mr. Dexter," Paul went on.

"Undoubtedly," Anthony answered, "for a moment. I did not expect the heather to have a voice."

"I apologize. Another time I will be less abrupt."

"Another time I shall be better prepared."

Paul Garnet turned to Rhoda.

"Will you come out?"

"If you like."

The girl spoke somewhat coldly.

"Mr. Dexter will excuse us," said Paul.

Anthony bowed again.

"But do not go," he said. "I myself am going outside for a while, so I shall not disturb you here."

He left the room without waiting for an answer, and passed through the passage and into the still, warm night outside, with the star-flecked sky above, and before him the dark stretch of the heath.

When he had gone, Paul Garnet turned to Rhoda and kissed her; then he put his hands upon her shoulders, and looked down into her face. His own face softened as he did so, and a light came into his eyes.

"Is it well, dear heart?" he said.

She answered him:

"Surely, now you are come."

She was still pale, and there was trouble in her eyes. Paul saw the trouble, but he would not notice it. He looked down at her, but for a while he did not speak.

"Rhoda," he said presently, "why did you take your lodger into that room?"

"Because——"

She hesitated.

"You never let me go in," he said.

"I did not take him in—as a man."

She stopped again.

"Oh, I am not jealous." Paul laughed scornfully. "Only I wondered why you did it."

"I don't know," Rhoda said, "that you would understand if I were to tell you."

"Indeed?" There was an inflection of sarcasm in Paul Garnet's voice. He paused, and then added, "Suppose you try me and see?"

Her eyes were on his. She did not withdraw them, but she waited a little before she answered.

"I don't think I will," she said.

"No? Well, I cannot, or, at any rate, I will not, influence you now. When we are always together, Rhoda, your spirit will be open to mine, and we shall have but one mind."

The girl did not shrink from the piercing gaze he fixed upon her; her eyes met his unflinchingly, yet with a certain absent look in them. She answered half dreamily:

"I wonder!"

Outside, beneath the clear sky, Anthony Dexter strode forward across the heath. He walked quickly, driven on by the excitement of the last half-hour, the fever of which was still upon him. The spell of the music—and music was the great factor in his existence; his enemy, inasmuch as the strong passions of it in his spirit preyed upon and wore his flesh; his friend, inasmuch as the glory and beauty of it made up for him the chief joy of living—held him yet. The madness of those last harmonies rioted through his brain and leaped in his pulses; and side by side with the echoing sounds went the vision of a mysterious face, with new consciousness breaking through its mystery, and a pathos of startled emotion in its eyes. He did not separate the sight from the sound; the two were indivisible; he could not think of one apart from the other.

Suddenly through the silence came a little obstinately penetrating sound, a short, dry cough, repeated at quick intervals. Anthony stopped, and in the star-lesened darkness saw a black object, thin and small, at no great distance away from him, and slowly drawing nearer. He felt, with something of the same feeling that had held him in the room the evening before, that it was old Boniface Wichelow, and he stood still and waited for him to approach.

"My lodger?" said old Wichelow when within a few paces.

"You are clever to recognize me in the dark."

"My eyes are poor—so poor that I do not trust them much ; but I felt it must be you."

There was a pause ; old Wichelow showed no intention of moving on.

"You have been to Breybridge?" said Anthony.

"Yes."

"You got what you wanted?"

"Of course."

There was another little silence ; then Boniface Wichelow said :

"Are you coming back with me?"

"I think not."

"You had better."

"I do not wish to go back yet."

"I have something to say to you."

"No, I—I cannot come now." The idea of walking back in company with the old man was peculiarly distasteful to Anthony. "No, I must go on," he said, and he broke away, almost at a run, across the heath.

Old Wichelow turned quietly and went on alone.

Anthony Dexter walked forward for nearly half an hour longer ; then, as the excitement died out of him, he began to feel that he was very tired, and he turned

his face homeward. His fatigue grew into exhaustion as he plodded his way back ; by the time he had come to his journey's end he was faint with weariness. When he reached Heather Den the house was dark ; the front door was firmly secured, and his repeated knockings evoked no sign of life within. At last, angry and exhausted, he found his way round to the back of the house, and there, instead of the blank dark mass of the front, a glow of light gave some promise of aid. The light came from one of the lower windows ; he knew directly that it burned in Rhoda Wichelow's room. He drew near the window ; it was lightly curtained with some thin, muslin-like material ; through it he could see a dim figure that kneeled upon the floor ; listening, he could hear faintly the sound of a voice that rose and fell. He waited, thinking she would presently rise ; but she did not rise, she kneeled on, her body bending now and again almost to the ground, and her voice now dying away, now rising almost to a cry ; and at last very gently he tapped upon the panes. She did not hear at first, and he repeated the sound more loudly and several times before her attention was aroused. When she heard him she rose at once, came toward the window, and drew the curtain aside. She stood for a minute, her figure outlined against the light behind ; she raised her hand and made a gesture, pointing over her shoulder : then she drew back again, and Anthony could see that she disappeared through the door of the room.

He went round to the front door again, and, reaching it, heard sounds of the drawing back of bolts and the lifting of a bar ; then the door was opened and Rhoda stood in the passage before him, a lighted candle on the stone floor beside her.

" Did I startle you ? " he said.

"No ; I expected you. I knew you were not in."

"I am very sorry——" he began.

"What for ?"

"To have given you all this trouble."

"It is not much trouble."

Anthony drew the bolts again and replaced the bar across the door. Rhoda held out the candle toward him.

"Would you like to take this with you ?" she said.

"You are not coming upstairs ?"

"No."

"Then——"

"I have a light," she interrupted. "Good-night."

"Good-night."

"Stay !" she said suddenly.

He turned, and she stood looking at him.

"And Paul Garnet ?" she said.

"Well ?" Anthony answered.

"What of him ?"

She was still looking at him.

"Do you mean, what do I think of him ?"

"Yes."

"I do not like him."

"He is to be my husband," she said slowly.

Anthony did not answer her ; he stood looking at her face, on which the flickering candle cast strange lights and shadows, till she turned away from him into the darkness of the room and left him alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

Alone walking,
In thought pleyning,
And sore syghyng,
Al desolate.

CHAUCER.

THE next day was Sunday, and the quiet of Heather Den seemed to be intensified. After the early breakfast Rhoda disappeared, and Anthony did not see her till nearly ten o'clock, when, as he sat in the room, he caught a glimpse of her going past the window. He rose up quickly and followed her along the rutted road that ran between the heath and the wood. He soon overtook her. She looked very prim in a narrow, straight gown of gray and a close-fitting bonnet.

"Are you going to church?" he asked.

"No; to chapel."

"You like chapel best?"

"No. Sometimes I go to church, but many of my people go to the chapel."

"May I come?" Anthony said.

"As you like."

"What do you do all the afternoon?" he went on.

"Shall I see you then?"

"All the afternoon I shall be with Paul."

Anthony Dexter stopped.

"I think—I hardly think I will go to chapel," he said.

Rhoda said nothing. She had stopped too, but after a moment's pause went on along the road. But when she had gone a few steps she stopped again, and turned toward him.

"This evening I shall sing," she said, "in the woods."

"Am I to come?"

She waited a little.

"It will be earlier to-night—about seven o'clock," was all she answered. Then she walked on again.

Anthony stood and looked along the road. His first impulse was to follow her; but the face of Paul Garnet rose up before him, and he did not move.

"No, I will not go," he thought; "and I will not go this evening to the woods. She is interesting, and the music—it seemed almost like the key; I should like to have seen how far it would reveal her. But there"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I dare say there isn't very much to reveal, after all, and she will marry like an ordinary woman, and be under the thumb of her husband."

He turned and walked back toward the house. How quiet it all was! too quiet, he began to think; dull in its wide loneliness. He had only arrived two days ago, and he had begun already to tire of the solitude.

"Farquhar was right," he thought. "I shall never be able to stay out the month. A week—if I stay till the end of the week, that is about all I can manage."

He wandered into the hayfield where he had talked with Rhoda the day before, and whiled away the morning idly; smoking, sometimes reading a few lines in the book he had kept in his hand when he had hurriedly left the house: thinking, as he imagined, of many things; in reality only of Rhoda Wichelow. Her face would not leave him; it floated in the wreaths of smoke that rose from his pipe; it peeped forth from the printed page he tried to read; it came and looked over his shoulder with just the same look it had worn when it had been drawn closer and closer to him by the music's power.

Immediately after the early dinner Rhoda left the

house again. Anthony had strolled up to the little mound whereon stood the fir-tree, and leaning against the thin, straight trunk, he could see the girl take her way across the heath. As she lost her individuality and became nothing more than a black object whose every movement made it smaller, he became aware of another moving thing amidst the heather, something that came in the opposite direction. He watched the two specks as they drew nearer and nearer to each other. At last they met, seemed to pause for a moment, then grew smaller and smaller as they moved on together further and further away.

Anthony stood for some minutes after they had disappeared, looking in a vague, unthinking way into the distance that held what he could no longer see. He was about to turn away, when, quite close to him, a voice spoke.

"Do you like him?" it said.

Anthony started and looked round. Close beside him, peering up with keen, malicious eyes into his face, stood old Boniface Wichelow.

"Whom do you mean?" Anthony asked.

"Him"—the old man pointed across the heath—"Paul—Paul Garnet that was here last night."

"No," said Anthony shortly.

"Nor do I. I do not like Paul Garnet," the old man went on after a pause. "He will have all that I love—my house and my lands. He is to marry Rhoda."

"Is that why you dislike him," asked Anthony—"because he will succeed to your property?"

"Surely. And he will take Rhoda away from me."

Anthony turned to him quickly.

"Are you fond of your granddaughter?"

"Ay." Old Wichelow began boring into the ground with his stick. "And she saves for me," he added.

"Well, if she didn't marry him she'd marry somebody else," said Anthony, "so it doesn't much matter."

"Anybody but Paul."

The words were said in a low tone, but with a concentrated vehemence that caused Anthony to turn again quickly to his companion.

"Why do you consent to the marriage if you dislike it so much?" he said.

The old man pressed his lips tightly together; he glanced up at Anthony out of the corners of his eyes; then, without speaking, he walked slowly away.

The afternoon wore on. Rhoda did not come in to tea, and Boniface was engaged in the smoking of his hardly acquired tobacco, so Anthony had the meal alone. He hurried over it, anxious to escape from the eyes of old Wichelow, who sat watching him through a film of smoke; and as soon as he could, he went out on the heath again.

The glare of the day was over; the sun was still hot, but no longer fierce; the shadows were long; over the bare heath the light lay in a full, soft flood. Anthony Dexter sat down beneath the fir-tree, and looked across the wide, unbroken stretch before him. It seemed to him that the distance that had swallowed those two black specks held them still; that far off in the horizon, beyond the point where his sight could reach, Rhoda Wichelow waited, hidden from him, but never moving beyond the dim boundary-line where the sky touched the heath; that she stood there bound by some spell of the man who had led her thither; that lost, motionless, enchanted, she lingered in the hazy thread of space between the dark earth and the light above, and had no power to come back to Heather Den till Paul Garnet should let her go.

His thoughts ran on dreamily. Could he break the

spell? Suddenly his heart stirred, and the blood came leaping up, and his eyes were shining instead of dreamy. A sense of power came to him, a certainty that he could break Paul Garnet's spell with a stronger force; that he could charm the girl who had faded away from him into the filmy distance, back again from the man who held her there; that with the power of the music that reigned in him, and could be aroused in her, he could draw her face from the face that watched it now, and make it confess the riddle in it to himself. He sat there exulting, triumphant, possessed by his heated fancies, till presently the fantastic nature of his thoughts became clear to him, and he jumped up with a short laugh that had some bitterness in it.

He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock, just an hour before the time that Rhoda would sing in the woods. But he would not go; those were mad fancies that had come to him; she had not, could not have, anything to do with his life. He would go for a walk; and he strolled on across the heath. He went forward for half a mile or so, paused, and looked at his watch again. It was a quarter past six. He went on, more quickly now. The house of Heather Den was sinking behind the little swell of heath that sheltered it, when he stopped once more; it was half-past six: and he strolled on yet further; and it was nearly seven.

Anthony Dexter looked over toward the woods: the evening would be further advanced in amongst the trees, he knew, than out on the open ground: he seemed to feel the soft hush that lay beneath the close-leaved branches, differing from the clear stillness of the heath; and he seemed to hear the hush stirred, sweetened, hardly broken, by the sound of full, plaintive notes, the voice of Rhoda Wichelow as she poured forth the sorrows that her heart had gathered in from the toil-worn

people around her. He stood, looking still toward the woods ; and her face, raised to the evening light, with the glow of exaltation on it, as he had seen it first, seemed to rise up out of the mass of foliage, and the lips bade him come to her. The great stillness of the evening was filled for him with the sound of her voice ; in all the stretching landscape he saw only her face. He lingered a while, listening to the silent sound, looking at the unseen face ; then he walked on, toward the woods.

CHAPTER IX.

My thoughts are all a case of knives,
Wounding my heart.

GEORGE HERBERT.

A QUARTER of an hour's quick walking brought Anthony to the path leading to the open space. When he reached it, he went more slowly ; he began to feel that Rhoda was near him and to hesitate, and Paul Garnet's face drove away the face that had led him hitherto. He still moved on, but with lingering, doubtful steps, as the sober reality encroached upon his dreams ; till at last he paused, not in doubt now, but in trembling delight ; for through the gray twilight of the still, listening trees came once more the voice he had longed to hear.

Hesitation was gone now ; he was in an enchanted world again ; and he moved forward rapidly, while the voice grew fuller and stronger, till at last he stood on the verge of the open space. He waited there while the rough, harsh voices joined with Rhoda's voice :

" Yes we'll gather at the river
That flows by the throne of God."

It was a revival hymn they sang, and the upward and downward heave of the voices as they dragged out the

swinging tune reminded Anthony of the heave and wash of waves breaking on a stony shore.

The smock-frocks were all clean this evening ; the shirt-sleeves were covered ; there were no rakes or pitchforks ; a prim, clean, Sunday air was on the group that stood round Rhoda Wichelow and listened to and joined in her singing.

Anthony still waited ; he had thought that when the hymn ceased he would go forward and show himself ; but when silence followed the singing, his old hesitation came back to him, and he did not move. But Rhoda turned to him as he stood half concealed amidst the trees :

“ You have come ? ” she said.

There was hardly inquiry so much as assertion in her voice.

“ Yes,” he answered, and came forward till he was clear of the foliage.

“ Come here,” she said, “ nearer.”

He obeyed her, his eyes on her face. As he advanced, the circle of men and women opened and let him pass through. There was no surprise on the people’s faces, hardly any interest ; the dull round of a working, unthinking existence breeds a stolidity that has in it but little capacity for wonder. The circle closed again ; just within it Anthony stood and faced Rhoda. She glanced round the group.

“ What would you like to sing ? ” she said.

Nobody answered at first ; the people looked at one another ; at last a voice said, “ Burden.” Rhoda folded her hands, and began to sing :

“ Oh, come, sinners, come, ’tis mercy’s call,
Here at Jesus’ feet ;
Oh, come, and, repenting, lay thy all
Down at Jesus’ feet.”

She turned to Anthony.

"Sing," she said.

Then she threw back her head slightly, and standing thus with upraised face, in the attitude that he knew, led the chorus :

" Oh, lay it down, lay it down,
Lay thy weary burden down ;
Oh, lay it down, lay it down,
Lay it down at Jesus' feet."

And Anthony Dexter did as he was bid, and sang, his voice joining with the cracked, nasal voices around him, his eyes fixed on the upturned face of Rhoda Wichelow. As he sang, the rhythmic run of the tune, and the sort of yearning that the melody threw into the words, and the words gave back to the melody, stirred in him a curious emotion, not wholly genuine nor altogether fictitious, which increased with each repetition of the chorus, and which gathered finally some reflection of the exaltation that lighted Rhoda's face.

When the hymn was over, there was a little pause of silence ; then Rhoda said :

"The time is getting on ; you will like perhaps to be going home ?"

But Anthony broke in upon her words.

"Not yet," he said. "Sing one more song—the song you sang when I came here the other night."

"Which song was it ?" the girl asked.

Anthony sang the air of the refrain ; and she bent her head, saying :

"Yes, I know." Then, looking round at the circle of faces, "Will you stay for one more song ?" she asked.

Several heads nodded, and some voices said "Yes" and "Surely ;" and the girl, going back into her old

position, broke into the quaint, plaintive melody that she had sung when Anthony had seen her first :

“Sorrow and toil through all the weary day,
Sorrow and toil, and neither let nor stay,
Sorrow and toil till life shall pass away ;
But oh for the rest beyond !”

There was a great pathos in her voice as she sang ; it chastened the beauty of her upturned face ; it ran in a quiver of longing through the notes of the refrain :

“But oh for the rest beyond !”

Anthony Dexter followed where she led ; the tide of her emotion bore him with it as it rose ; in the last verse his voice sang with hers, and his being thrilled as the two voices swelled and sank, alone and together.

The last notes of the refrain died away ; the people, in ones, and twos, and threes, disappeared amongst the trees ; Anthony and Rhoda were left alone in the cleared space. The air was no longer quite still ; a little breeze wandered fitfully through the wood ; the leaves stirred gently with a faint rustling.

Anthony said at last :

“I came, you see.”

“Yes.”

Rhoda's face was still upraised, the eyes looking skyward. Anthony stood by in silence, content to watch her. Presently she turned to him.

“Shall we go home ?”

“Not yet.”

The man's worn, delicate features showed something of the trouble within him. The girl looked at him questioningly, and as she looked the fervour died out of her face, and the impalpable secret charm of her ordinary expression stole back to it again. Then he spoke.

“Why do you marry Paul Garnet ?”

The impenetrable look on her face grew stronger.

"Why should you ask me?" she answered.

"You are right," he said; "it was impertinent in me to ask you."

She made no answer, but, passing him by, entered the little path that led back to Heather Den, and walked in silence through the woods.

Anthony paused a moment or two in indecision, then he followed her. All through the woods the faint rustling of the leaves was like a voice of the twilight singing the day to rest; from time to time a bird called with a lonely note; far off, on the borders of the dim grayness that floated between the trees, was a glow of golden light. The hush, and the movement of the leaves, the gold and the gray together, the beauty and the mystery of eventide, all seemed to Anthony to be inspired by some strange dream spirit, that swayed himself as well as the woods, that breathed forth ecstasy as well as longing, that found its embodiment in the girl moving on with measured, silent steps before him. He followed her, hardly caring, after the first little while, that she did not speak; content only to walk on and on so long as she moved before him.

But on the borders of the wood, where the trees stood less close together and the sunset light was full, she paused and turned and spoke to him.

"You asked me why I am going to marry Paul," she said, "and I would not tell you, because, as I said yesterday, you do not belong to my life, and what I do and do not do is for me, and not for you, to judge of. But now I will tell you all you wish to know. Question me, and I will answer."

She leaned up against a little thin tree; she put her hands behind, clasping the trunk at her back; her eyes looked at him with almost a mocking look.

"I have asked my question," he said.

"You should know the answer."

"The answer, the right answer, should be—love."

She smiled almost imperceptibly.

"That is the right answer," she said.

"You love him?"

"Of course."

"I do not believe it. You do not know what love is."

She looked at him with unfathomable eyes.

"What is it?" she said.

"What is it? Do you mean——"

Anthony took a step forward; the girl's face was very beautiful with the sunset light upon it.

She brought one of her arms forward from behind the tree, and held up her hand with a forbidding gesture. Anthony stopped—more than stopped; he drew back again to his former place.

"I mean what I say," Rhoda said. "You tell me I do not know what love is; but how can I judge if you are right, if you do not tell me what it ought to be?"

Anthony did not answer at once, and she added in a lower tone:

"If you know."

"If I know——" Anthony began, then pulled himself up. "I cannot tell you," he said.

"And you do not wish to question me any more!"

"No."

"Then we will go on."

Rhoda drew herself upright, and came a step or two away from the tree.

"And yet," said Anthony, "there are questions I should like to ask you—if I dared."

The girl took up her old position by the tree, except that her arms hung before her now, the hands loosely clasped.

"Dare," she said.

"Then—if I dare—what is it you mean by love? I cannot believe you know."

She waited a minute, her eyes on the ground; her face had a doubtful, thoughtful look. Presently she glanced up.

"If I answer by questions, will you answer my questions?"

"As far as I can."

"Is there admiration in love?"

"Yes."

"I admire strength; and Paul is strong."

There was a pause; the light was growing fainter; the wind in the trees had a sighing, mournful sound.

"Well," said Anthony presently, "and the questions?"

"I cannot ask them, and I cannot answer you. Leave me to my life!"

There was a break in the girl's voice as she said the last words, and something both of appeal and defiance in her eyes. She did not give Anthony time to answer her, but, turning suddenly, strode on toward the house. Anthony followed her, but she did not turn or look at him again; and as soon as they reached Heather Den, she went into the curtained room, and he did not see her any more that night.

CHAPTER X.

And music lifted up the listening spirit
Until it walked exempt from mortal care,
Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound.

SHELLEY.

ALL through the week Anthony saw very little of Rhoda Wichelow. The greater part of the day she was in the fields working with the haymakers, and every evening after supper she went outside to her lover. Once Anthony said to her: "Have you known Paul Garnet long?" And she answered: "All my life."

But he had very little opportunity of speaking to her. At mealtime old Boniface, a silent, observing presence, was a constraint on even the simplest, most ordinary, conversation; and in any case Anthony would have found it almost impossible to talk in an ordinary way with Rhoda. For the first few days he made no effort to see her; he told himself that he could not be really interested in a girl who was going to be married to another man; and he did not go into the fields to seek her, nor into the woods to hear her sing. But on Thursday morning he waited in the passage till she should go out, and when he saw her coming he placed himself in the doorway, barring her exit.

"Do you still sing?" he said.

"Yes."

"This evening, too?"

"Yes. But you must not come."

"Why not?"

"I like better to be with my people alone."

She made a little movement forward as though she wished to pass him, and he drew to one side and let her go.

The great silence that had brooded over Heather Den during the first few days of Anthony's stay there was faintly broken now ; all day long a breeze that came and went stirred the leaves in the woods to a gentle rustling every little while, and at night with a sighing sound it crept about the house. Very often he lay awake and listened to it as it mingled with the murmur of Rhoda Wichelow's voice in the room below ; and as night after night the two sounds mixed themselves in his ear, they grew at last into a melody that he heard, sang, saw in his mind written out in harmonies and longed to play.

It was a quiet, gray evening ; the light breeze that had blown for many days was still ; a thin haze lay upon the heath and veiled the sunset ; the twilight came a little earlier than its wont. Anthony Dexter and old Wichelow sat at supper in the room : Rhoda had not come in. The old man hurried through his meal, and rose from the table before Anthony had finished eating.

"I must go," he said. "I have business to-night."

"You are going out ?"

"Aye."

"Have you far to go ?"

"There is no house near at hand."

The old man was buckling on a pair of old weather-beaten gaiters, which he kept in the chimney corner and wore always when he went out.

"It will soon be dark," said Anthony.

"I know my way in the dark as well as in the light."

"I believe you can see in the dark," said Anthony.

Old Wichelow had finished putting on his gaiters now, and rose up.

"You do not want to see when you know the way," he answered.

He went out of the room, and presently Anthony saw

him pass the window with his slow, somewhat halting gait. Anthony stood gazing out on to the heath ; it looked very lonely to-night, and the quiet of the place was a burden. He began to long for sound—any sound ; and in a minute his longing was satisfied—and sweetly. From outside came the sound of a voice singing, and, faint though it was, he knew the voice at once ; it was Rhoda Wichelow's. She sang the air that seemed to him part of herself, the air he had first heard her sing ; and as she came nearer, as she passed by the window where he watched, he heard, or seemed to know without definitely hearing, the words she sang :

“Hearts tired with beating all the weary years ;
But oh for the rest beyond !”

Her voice ceased when she reached the door of the house. Anthony heard her footsteps in the passage and then on the stairs, and after a little while she came into the room. He went forward to meet her.

“The supper is cold.”

“I do not mind.”

“If I had known you would be in so soon I would have asked Sally to keep something hot for you ; but I thought you would not come till your usual time—after the table had been cleared.”

“I do not mind,” Rhoda said again ; “and I am very hungry.”

“You did not come in to tea this afternoon.”

“No ; I could not come.”

“Your grandfather has gone out,” said Anthony presently.

“Yes. It is Micah Yates' rent day.”

“Does he go for the rent, do you mean—at this hour ?”

“Micah would not be in before this hour.”

The girl went on eating her supper. Anthony watched her from his corner by the window. In the dusk he could only see the outline of her figure, as she sat by the table ; her face was dim.

"You must be very tired," he said at last.

"Not very ; I do not tire easily. But I am tired."

"Shall you go out to-night ?"

"Of course." Rhoda paused a minute, and then added : "It is the only way of seeing Paul."

"He could come in to-night," said Anthony. "Your grandfather is out, and I can go away."

Rhoda had risen ; she came over to the window, and stood not far from him, looking through the panes. She did not speak, and presently he said :

"You need not go out."

"I would rather go out." The girl leaned her head against the frame of the window ; her face was turned toward Anthony, but in the half-light he could not see it plainly. "It is more natural to see Paul outside," she said. "He is like the heath."

"How—if I may ask ?"

"It is wild and desolate"—she turned again and looked out of the window—"but there is strength in it, and it holds you to it. Paul is like that."

As she finished speaking, a whistle sounded through the stillness outside, and a dark figure came out of the haze toward the window. Rhoda Wichelow turned and left the room. Anthony, still standing by the window, saw her come out of the door on to the flagged space outside, saw Paul Garnet come near to her and kiss her, saw the two figures walk side by side on to the heath and disappear in the haze and the twilight, back again into that shadowy region of distance, wherein, his fancy told him, her lover held her with a spell.

He stood without moving, still looking out into the

thickening night, till the room was quite dark, and only the last wan gleams of daylight still lingered on the heath. The house seemed weird in its loneliness ; he listened, and could hear no sound ; he crossed the room, found his way along the passage to the outer door, and went forth into the less oppressive solitude outside. He stood still a few minutes, looking up at the sky that was a little clearer now ; then he walked on, not over the heath, but round by the back of the house toward the fields.

The fields, too, lay under the spell of silence that seemed almost part of the place ; only now and again came the faint tinkling of a bell, as some cow or sheep in the pasture-meadows changed its place or position ; the still, filmy air was weighted with the scent of the hay. Anthony Dexter stood leaning against a gate, looking up the dim slant of the hill ; and the melody that had its rise in the mingled murmur of the wind and of Rhoda's voice throbbed and wailed in his brain, till the longing to hear it, to embody it in outward sound, to pour out his heart in the playing of it, grew strong to a strength that was torment. He sang it aloud, but his voice sounded weird and ghostly in the midst of the dark silence, and the harmonies that moved below the air still craved for utterance.

He turned from the gate, and walked back rapidly toward the house. The desire of his art was upon him, the desire to bring forth, to clothe in concrete form his own creation ; and all the passion, the exaltation, the keen joy and pain that creation brings, possessed and commanded his being. One way of deliverance, at any rate, he would find for the thing that struggled within him. He had brought with him no materials for the writing of music ; but in some way, however rudely and roughly, he would put down on paper, at least, the

melody that cried in his heart and brain ; with the harmonies that gave to each note the just tone and spirit and delicate shade of meaning.

He hurried on toward the house ; he was near it now, close to its walls ; he walked on toward the corner of the building to make his way round to the front ; he passed close to the window of Rhoda Wichelow's curtained room ; and then he stopped and drew a long breath, for the window was open. A sudden thought came to him and made his heart beat faster. The piano was old, creaking, inadequate ; but it had a voice, poor and insufficient though it was, and he could make it speak ; and the desire to find some means of telling out the music that struggled for expression was strong and full and desperate. But Rhoda ? Could he dare to enter unbidden the room that was a sort of temple of her inward, hidden life, that knew perhaps the mystery lying behind the face he could not read, that was sacred from the intrusion even of the man she acknowledged as her lover ? The idea of entering it at her bidding carried with it something of profanation ; to enter it without her knowledge or her will would be an outrage, a sacrilege. He hesitated ; the thought of her face in anger or in scorn counselled him to flee from the temptation that beckoned to him through the open window ; but the thought of her face brought the thought of her voice, and her voice belonged to the desire that clamoured for fulfilment.

And the desire conquered ; it grew in strength with the possibility of satisfaction ; it rose up in a mighty flood of longing, and drove all other thoughts and feelings before it. Anthony Dexter did not wait long in parley with himself ; he put his hands upon the sill, drew himself up, and in two seconds he was in the room. It was dark, but he did not want light ; he knew where

the instrument stood. He found his way to it and sat down. It was open. He felt with his hands over the keys and began to play.

As he played, heaven opened to him, the heaven of the artist whose god is his art ; and to all artists there are times when the God who created the gift of creation moves before them invisible, in a cloud whose vapours are ideals unexpressed, and a pillar whose fire is ecstasy. Through the open window the sounds that swelled up and filled the room floated out into the dark, silent night. To Anthony Dexter the room and the night, the heath and the loneliness, and Rhoda and Paul, became as nothing, or as featureless parts of one indefinable, rapturous emotion. The melody that had striven within him so long found voice at last ; the harmonies that had blended themselves in his brain came forth in full spreading cords : in the melody was the sob of the wandering wind ; in the cords the impalpable sense of mystery that floated in the rhyme and wail of the air as it had sung itself into being.

He played on and on, varying the harmonies and the key, and the march and phrasing of the melody : now letting the chords ripple beside it in quick, fleeting notes ; now piling them together in full, rich strength ; now robbing them note by note till harmony was almost dead ; now letting a discord break and flash upon their satisfying beauty. As he played, the old faulty instrument beneath his hands seemed to gather power and sweetness of tone ; his spirit seemed to enter into and possess the strings ; richer, fuller, grander, stronger, more eloquent of passion and of longing were the sounds that floated out to the woods and the heath and lost themselves amongst the trees or in space ; and the heart of the man throbbed with delight, and his soul rejoiced. The time went on, but he held no

count of time ; the emotion that swayed him, like all emotion, when it rises above a certain height, carried him beyond time into a state wherein time stands aside, while eternity shows itself behind the ages.

There were other sounds amidst the night's silence, and there was light not far from the darkness amidst which he played ; but he was conscious of nothing but his music ; and the thought that it was getting late, and that the owners of the house would be coming back, never stirred his brain. But at last there came a sound that broke in upon his abstraction, the swishing sound of metal rings drawn rapidly along a rod ; and the door was opened, and a figure, dark against the light behind, stood in the doorway, the pushed-back curtain falling thickly at one side of it. Then Anthony Dexter came back into time, and the life of Heather Den ; suddenly the music stopped, and his hands slid off the keys, and he sat abashed, confused, and silent.

Rhoda Wichelow stood in the doorway, silent too ; but behind her a voice said : " You are an accomplished musician, Mr. Dexter ; " and the face of Paul Garnet looked in over the girl's shoulder.

Anthony rose, and came out of the darkness into the light of the room. Old Wichelow sat on the settle, blinking his eyes.

" You're favoured," he said, pointing with one finger to the doorway across which Rhoda was drawing the curtain. " Neither the old man, nor"—he looked at Paul—" nor the young one, is allowed in there."

" I went in," began Anthony ; " I——"

He broke off : there was nothing that he could say.

Rhoda had come away from the doorway, and was standing now with her face toward him ; but she did not speak ; she moved a little closer to Paul Garnet's side. It was Paul who broke the silence.

"The organ, I believe, is your instrument, Mr. Dexter?" he said.

"Yes."

"There is an organ at the Hall. It would give me great pleasure if you would come on Sunday afternoon and show me how it ought to be played. I say Sunday, because that is the only afternoon that Miss Wichelow considers herself free, and I know she would like to hear you play."

"You are very kind," stammered Anthony; "but I—I will not intrude upon you."

"Intrusion and an invited guest can have nothing in common," said Paul Garnet. "I shall take it amiss if you do not come. And besides," he went on, a half-smile lighting his dark face, "you owe Miss Wichelow some amends for the—shall I call it intrusion? which your genius has led you into this evening. You cannot refuse compensation."

"Miss Wichelow shall command me," said Anthony stiffly.

He looked at Rhoda. She put a hand on Paul's arm, and standing thus, and looking back at Anthony, said:

"Come."

CHAPTER XI.

The fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE night had come; the lights were all put out at Heather Den—all but two. One burned in Anthony's room, and one in the room below, where Rhoda, kneeling on the floor, prayed in quaint, cant phrases to be delivered from the devil's wiles. Overhead Anthony listened to the low murmur of her voice. He sat by

the open window ; the murky sky made the night dark, hiding the stars, and there was no moon. He was overwrought, tired, depressed, miserable ; the reaction from the burning mood of the evening was upon him ; and he lived again and again through that minute when Rhoda Wichelow, standing in the doorway of the sanctuary he had violated, had made him no reproach but silence.

The wind was still to-night ; the woods, whose rustling leaves had whispered to him in melody during many past nights, were still too ; everywhere a stretching out of the silence that would neither blame nor forgive ; and through it all the low, vague murmur of the voice he longed, yet dreaded to hear, in louder speech. The man's strong, nervous hands gripped the window-ledge as he sat ; he suffered, not appreciating the full meaning and purport of his suffering ; not understanding either the depth or the nature of the feeling that Rhoda Wichelow had awakened in him ; not knowing that the interest which had arisen in curiosity had developed into something of more imperative force. The reaction from strong emotion made him weary ; the presence of fresh emotion, humiliating and bitter, made him restless ; he paced to and fro, seeking relief and finding none, waiting till bodily exhaustion should bring ease to his tired mind. And still the murmur of the voice below, and still the quiet in the woods, and the un stirring calm of the air.

But at last there came a break in the silence with the sound in it ; the voice was hushed, and the stillness was freed from the note of complaining that had seemed to fill it. Anthony was close to his door when the voice ceased. He stopped his restless walking and listened ; then hastily, with a sudden impulse, he opened the door and stepped out on to the landing. He stood hesitating ;

the candle he held cast a flickering, uncertain light out into the dense darkness; the house was full of great black shadows, thick as substance. Then, far off, he heard the sound of a faint footfall on the stone floor of the passage, and saw beyond the blackness the ghost of a light struggling to rise from below. Rhoda was coming.

Anthony did not pause to think; he moved forward quickly along the length of the landing to the head of the staircase and began to descend. He met Rhoda about halfway down. She stopped two steps below him; her face looked up at him out of a deep darkness: the light of his candle shone down upon it and showed it plainly; her own candle threw an upward light upon her throat and chin.

They stood through a little space of silence. Her eyes were calm, and held a spirit of peace; Anthony's eyes were troubled, and his lips moved nervously.

"You will never forgive me," he whispered at last.

"Yes," she said.

"I was mad," he went on, "when I did it."

"No, not you; it was the music."

"You can never understand how it was," he persisted. She narrowed her eyes, looking up at him.

"I can understand."

"Can you?"

It was as if a spirit moved across the face of his mood, troubling the humility, the abject self-abasement, that lay there; and from the depths beneath there rose to the ruffled surface other impulses—less pure than the one that had led him hither, other thoughts—more selfish.

"Can you understand?" he said. "Can music indeed conquer you?"

One hand resting on the banisters, the wavering light

of the candles playing on her face, she still looked up at him, but did not answer. But the peace in her eyes was broken, and the mystery of her face came forth.

"Is it true?" he said—"is it true that there is in music something that calls—commands you?"

She still paused. A quiver moved her lips, and then at last :

"Alas !" she said, "it is true."

"Why alas?" He came down a step, a little nearer to her. "Why should it be alas?"

Her eyes had a sort of fear in them ; she answered in a broken voice :

"Because the thing—the power is evil."

"How so?"

His voice, his air, grew more authoritative as hers became feebler. She answered him obediently :

"Before you came it was beauty—all that I knew ; and I had power over it."

"And now?"

"Now the beauty has a terror and a horror in it, and the power——"

"Yes?"

"Is in it, not me."

"I almost thought so."

He spoke with a slow triumph.

"Let me go," she said.

"Not yet. Is it all evil?"

She answered quickly :

"Oh, no ! If it were——"

"Yes?"

"I could conquer it."

"There is good too?"

"Let me go," she said again.

He barred her way.

"You must answer me."

- “Then I will tell you,” she said with sudden, fierce energy, “that in the music that you make there are heights and depths I never knew or dreamed of. It is worship, and it is hell.”

Then all at once her candle was out, and, with a quick movement that took him unawares, she had reached up and grasped his hand that held the light, and it was all darkness. In the darkness she fled by him up the stairs, and he was left alone, and the quiet swept through the house again.

CHAPTER XII.

If any strength we have, it is to ill ;
But all the good is God's, both power and eke will.

SPENSER.

FANELANDS HALL lay low in a hollow near the edge of the woods. The trees came close to it on all sides but one, where narrow fields led down to a stretch of common land. The house had a neglected air : the shutters were closed in most of the windows ; the creepers that climbed the stained, red-brick walls hung drooping in untrained disorder ; in the garden the grass grew rank and tall, and weeds rose side by side with such hardy flowers as came up and bloomed untended year after year.

The trees nearest to the house were the abode of many rooks, and all day long their cawing voices made a melancholy accompaniment to the empty solitude of the place.

Paul Garnet's father had been a gambler, and the son lived frugally, wiping off year by year the heavy mortgages which had descended to him together with the estate.

On Sunday, the third of July, the brilliant sunshine, the rich, full green of the foliage, the glory and beauty of a summer's day, drove away the look of desolation from the garden, and gave a certain air of warmth and life even to the house with its closed windows and weather-beaten walls. Paul Garnet and Rhoda Wiche-low came out of the woods and took their way to what had once been the flower-garden. It was partially enclosed by a wall, and against the wall was a wooden summer-house, covered with straggling creepers ; they entered it and sat down. The air was full of summer sounds : the chirping of grasshoppers, the hum of insects, the song of birds ; and behind these sounds was the hoarse, constant cawing of the rooks. Rhoda sat looking out at a tangled growth of half-wild roses opposite the summer-house ; Paul looked at Rhoda's face.

"The time is coming near," he said at last.

"What time?"

"The time when you and I will have one name, one life, one being. I am no longer so hard pressed, Rhoda ; I can marry you now."

"Now?"

"When you will ; it is for you to decide."

She turned to him quickly.

"Let it be soon," she said.

Paul rose up.

"Come into the house ; I have something to show you."

He walked on through the narrow, over-grown paths, and Rhoda followed him. He entered the house, not by the chief entrance, but by a smaller door at the side, opening into a narrow passage. The passage led into a large hall, shaped like the letter L ; the chief part of it was the height of the whole house, and along one side,

high up in the wall, was a row of little windows, lighting a corridor above ; the smaller part was only the height of the neighbouring rooms, and from it the staircase opened, winding round and round to the upper story. The hall was lighted by a high window on each side of the front door, and by another facing the door, big, mullioned, filled with stained glass. All round the walls doors opened off into the several rooms, and opposite the open fireplace, halfway down the hall, was a large organ.

Paul Garnet opened a door near the fireplace, and Rhoda followed him into the room into which it led. The shutters were folded back in this room, and the warm sunlight streamed in upon white-paneled walls. Rhoda looked about her in amazement. The windows were draped with curtains of rich old damask ; a soft, thick carpet covered the floor ; furniture, carved, inlaid, of various styles, but all beautiful and costly, stood against the walls and out in the room ; there were ornaments on the mantelpiece, and books and china in the cabinets.

"Do you like it ?" asked Paul.

"What is it ?" the girl said in a low, almost awestruck voice.

"It is salvage," answered Paul—"the little that escaped from the wreck. From the resources of the whole house, Rhoda, I have only been able to furnish you one room."

Rhoda still looked about her ; a flush of pleasure rose to her face.

"Oh, I like it !" she said.

"Yes," said Paul, "I knew you would like it. And the pictures," he went on, "do you like them too ? They are the only ones I did not sell."

There were only three pictures in the room. One

was large, a full-length portrait of a woman, with a young, sweet, rather dreamy face ; the others were small: a landscape and a woman's head. Rhoda looked first at the portrait.

"Who is it ?" she asked.

"My mother. They say it is like her ; I never knew her, as you know."

"And this one ? Ah !"

Rhoda had turned to the picture nearest to her ; it was a view of the heath and the woods near Heather Den, and the painter had caught something of the spirit that brooded over the heath and haunted the woods, and so had made a picture with life and truth in it. The girl looked at it in silence ; at last she turned, and her eyes glanced round the room again.

"There and here," she said in a low voice.

"Here is waiting for you. When will you come ?"

"But for my grandfather," she answered, "and the people, I would come to-morrow."

"Your grandfather ? What is he to you ?"

"It will go hard with him to let me go."

"I will engage that he shall let you go."

Rhoda looked into his eyes.

"Yes," she said ; then she added : "But the people. If I am not there to stand by them ?"

"And I—am I nothing ?"

She looked at him again ; his eyes seemed to draw and hold her gaze.

"You know," she said at last.

"Look at the other picture," said Paul.

She moved along by the wall till she faced the picture of the woman's head ; she stood looking at it in silence, and Paul, standing near her, looked at both it and her.

"It is the most valuable picture of the whole collection," he said at last. "My grandfather got it by a

curious chance when he was quite a young man travelling in Italy. It is said to be an original, but whether it is or not, it has all the spirit, all the characteristics, of Leonardo's work."

Rhoda still looked at the picture, and did not answer.

"I could have sold it for a larger sum than many of the other pictures," said Paul. "Do you know why I did not sell it?"

She answered, without taking her eyes from the picture :

"It is like me."

"You see the likeness?"

"I feel it. The woman there," Rhoda went on after a pause, "had the same feelings in her that I have. She might have been——"

"An angel," said Paul, as she hesitated, "as all women are."

"Or——"

Rhoda stopped again.

"A devil, as all women might be."

"In the face there," Rhoda said, "the devil has won."

Paul laughed gently.

"I think so."

The girl turned to him suddenly.

"Am I really like her?"

He still smiled.

"Potentially."

"You can see the devil in my face?"

"I hope so."

She gave a quick little cry.

"Ah! if I could cast it out."

Paul Garnet put his hands upon her shoulders, and bent his face close to hers.

"Don't try," he said. "I believe that your potential wickedness is that which chiefly feeds my love. You

could never have grown into my being till you had become what you are—part of myself—if your nature had been as simple and stainless as your outward life has been.”

“You do not know,” she answered. “If it should lead me, drive me, this devil that you say you love, away from you.”

He smiled again.

“It cannot ; I am stronger than the strongest part of you.”

“Are you sure ? And you are not always there ! ”

“I soon shall be. But even so, in the meantime, I have no fear ; and I like to try, to prove my strength.”

Her eyes looked up at him doubtfully.

“You have always ruled me,” she said ; “but you do not understand me quite.”

“Do I not ? ”

“The bad in me”—she spoke dreamily, slowly, pausing for her words ; her eyes had very much the expression of the picture’s eyes, Paul thought—“the bad and the strongest part of me have quickened into life together ; they are joined, or circumstances have joined them, and it—that something that holds my highest and my lowest—is something you cannot enter into.”

“You are quite sure ? ” he asked.

She gazed at him, a vague trouble in her face.

“Ah, Paul ! ” she said suddenly ; “I fear it.”

“Fear what ? ”

She had not time to answer ; as he spoke, the door was thrown open and Paul’s housekeeper announced :

“Mr. Dexter.”

CHAPTER XIII.

He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.

R. BROWNING.

THE low sun streamed through the stained-glass window in the hall, throwing strips and patches of colour on its dark floor. In the deep seat below the window sat Rhoda and Paul, side by side; he a little turned toward her so that he could see her profile, she looking straight down the hall. Anthony Dexter sat at the organ, and the hall was filled with the sound of the music that he made. He had been playing for half an hour, and all the time Rhoda had sat quite still, listening, her hands lying quiet in her lap, her eyes looking into a world of music, in which were no clear thoughts or distinct pictures, but all was vague and indefinite; and always Paul looked at her with a sort of watchfulness in his look. Little Rufus Stockbridge, with a clean collar and a sweating face, worked away steadily at the bellows. He thought the great swelling sounds that came from the instrument very grand and beautiful, and that he was the chief agent in producing them.

Anthony had played Mozart, Bach, a suite of Corelli's and a toccata of Galuppi's, and through it all Rhoda had sat quite still. Now and again her colour changed and her breath was drawn more quickly; but the old music, simple in spirit though elaborate in form, created in her an emotion so gentle that its flow was rest, so solemn that it carried her out and above the everyday atmosphere of her thoughts and feelings and made peace between her spirit and her nature. Then came a pause, and she knew that she was sitting beneath the great stained window at Fanelands, that Paul was watching

her, and that it was Anthony Dexter who had called forth the sounds now dying away in the corners of the hall.

Paul rose from his seat and walked down to the organ.

"You are tired perhaps, Mr. Dexter?"

"Oh, no!"

The light of the music was in Anthony's eyes. He had begun to play simply as a man who had a professional knowledge of his instrument and his art; now the musician was awake in him, and he forgot for the time that he had come to Fanelands against his will, and that his host was to him as an enemy.

"Will you play on, then?" Paul said; and Anthony played on.

Still the ancient music, solemn or blithesome; and still Rhoda listened, self-contained and enjoying; and Paul listened, with the appreciation born of knowledge and culture. But when the next pause came, Paul rose again and went over to the musician's side.

"Play something modern," he said.

Anthony looked up at him. There was a curious expression on Paul's face—of defiance, with a touch of the old insolence. As Anthony met his gaze, his own expression altered, and a challenge sprang up in his eyes. He bowed his head without speaking, and before Paul had reached his seat again, the hurrying notes of one of Schumann's wildest moods were pressed forth from the organ's pipes.

Paul sat down and looked at Rhoda. The girl's colour had risen, and her hands, lying so peacefully before her, moved gradually, bit by bit, one toward the other, till each clasped and held its fellow; then, as the fantastic whirl rushed on, she sat upright instead of leaning back against the cushions, and a brighter light burned in her eyes. Still the music, though it called to

her and her emotional nature answered to the call, left her master of the excited spirit within her, and Paul, watching her, saw that her self-possession remained to her yet. When the tumult was stilled, and Anthony with soft modulations passed during a minute or two from key to key, he leaned toward her.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"Look at me, Rhoda."

She turned to him.

"Yes," he said, "the Leonardo eyes tell me that you do."

"Are they——"

She stopped suddenly. Anthony had reached the key he sought, and now, after a moment's silence to let the sound of his own chords perish, he struck the opening chords of the overture to "*Tannhäuser*." Slow and strange the sounds swept out and filled the hall, swept up its length through the fading, coloured light from the stained window, fell upon Rhoda Wichelow's ear, and struck some answering chord in her being that throbbed and thrilled and almost winced at the touch. The colour died out of her face, and left it pale; her lips trembled; her hands, unclasped, clutched at the folds of her dress. The magic, significant harmonies followed one upon the other in the slow, weighty march of the melody, and Rhoda listened with a wonder that awed and troubled her, yet left her quite still; but when the chord sounded that comes at the beginning of the thirteenth bar, she uttered a sharp, low cry; the combination of notes smote her as with physical pain, and she half rose from her seat. Then Paul, very gently, touched her arm with his hand. She turned on him a momentary glance, and sank back on to the seat. He still kept his touch upon her, and she sat bending

forward, her eyes looking out of the light into the dusky space in the middle of the hall, where the dim form of the musician bent over the organ's keys ; and as the slow majesty of the opening passed into the passion that grows and grows as the overture proceeds, she felt something of the wild emotion, saw something of the weird, unearthly scenes, that Wagner felt and saw when he wrote "Tannhäuser."

The music ceased at last ; only the ghost of it lingered in the air. Rufus Stockbridge wiped his brow, and began to think that though music was a fine thing, and mighty easy in the making, a lad had enough of it after a time. Anthony Dexter sat with hands that drooped beside him, his face aglow. Rhoda was motionless, a cold reaction trampling down the fever of her emotion, though her heart still quivered and throbbed. Paul took his hand from her arm, but kept his eyes upon her face. Then suddenly Anthony raised his hands to the keys again, and leaned forward ; Rufus Stockbridge with a sigh set manfully to work, and once again the silence fled before the organ's voice.

And now Anthony played the air that he had played two nights before in Rhoda's curtained room ; the air that had been born in him from the mingling of her voice with the wind, that seemed to him to bear a part of her and all himself in it, that yet made him almost forget himself and her and all the world as the spirit in it found utterance. It was very different, this great organ, from the creaking, limited piano ; now his conception came forth in a body of sound that gave it adequate expression ; and he clothed it with all the shades of passion and of meaning of which he was consummate master. And Rhoda sat still at first, with an intense, almost apparent, stillness that told of effort and constraint.

The dusk was deepening now ; the colours on the dark floor were growing dim ; through the tall windows on either side of the big door the sky showed pale and gray. Then once again Rhoda rose to her feet, and once again Paul touched her arm. This time she did not turn to him, nor did she go back to her seat ; she only stood still and, motionless, seemed to wait, to hover between two conflicting influences that drew her, one forward, one back, and held her powerless between them.

The patches of colour grew paler and paler as the light faded ; the dusk grew in the centre of the hall ; the bending form of Anthony Dexter was dim and undefined. He had piled up a mass of chords about the melody that he played ; he had almost hidden it in a torrent of rushing notes ; he had let it peep forth from a network of intricate variations ; now he let it die quite away, while with one hand he played a few slow, faint notes. In that little pause Rhoda drew a deep breath, and the intense stillness of her attitude was relaxed.

Then Anthony reached up and drew out another stop, and once more the melody arose, breathed forth in slow simplicity. The wailing sound of it was intensified now ; the cry and the sadness in it bore an added strength : Rhoda obeyed that mysterious part of herself which answered instinctively to certain tones and harmonies ; she took a step forward.

Paul's hand was still upon her arm, and he tightened his grasp. She paused, and in the pause Anthony altered the time and rhythm of the air ; the voice of the organ sang it out now with a lilt and a restless, striving passion that had in it something both of mockery and despair. Then Rhoda forgot everything but the music's power. Paul rose, and his hand pressed heavily upon

her ; but she did not heed him, hardly noticed that he tried to hold her back ; she still moved on ; and Paul, with a curious look upon his face, drew back, and let her go. On she went, step by step, down the darkening hall, nearer and nearer to the dim, bent form : and when she had nearly reached it, Anthony Dexter turned his face toward her and smiled.

From the window-seat Paul Garnet, a dark blot against the faded colours of the irregular, leaded panes, watched the two shadowy figures ; he could not see the face of either of them, but he could see that Rhoda drew nearer and nearer to the organ and to the man who played it. She was very near now ; she bent toward him ; and he played on, looking back at her, the smile still upon his face.

Then he altered the time again, and the stops, and now it was a march of devils that she listened to. All the wailing, all the sadness of despair, was gone : the music was full of turbulent triumph, of wild, intemperate impulses, of unholy rejoicing ; and as Rhoda listened, her eyes grew furtive, and a half-frightened, half-reckless look came into her face.

Anthony's face was white ; his lips moved slightly ; the smile still lingered as he whispered :

" Will you come ? "

" Where ? " With a little backward movement Rhoda said the word.

" Wherever I choose to lead."

Paul Garnet had risen from his seat ; he strode down the hall ; he stood by the organ's side, half hidden from view, and watched Rhoda's bending figure and Anthony's face, gleaming white amidst the shadows.

" Wherever I choose to lead," Anthony said ; and the onward rush of the music seemed to expect and compel an answer to his will. Would Rhoda give it ? She

bent a little forward; her lips parted; and then Paul came forward.

He stood by Rhoda's side; he put his hand under her chin, and turned her face toward his own; but he did not speak.

The music went on, fiercer, sadder, rising in a tempest of mad abandonment, sinking into a low cry of despair; and the two upright figures remained motionless; and the musician still looked back, the smile set and hard on his pale face.

Paul's dark eyes grew confident as he waited. Presently he took his hand from under the girl's upturned face; still she did not move, and the confidence in his eyes deepened.

Then at last he spoke:

"Come."

He turned and walked slowly away, and Rhoda followed him.

When they reached the window-seat, there was no sound but the sound of their own movements; suddenly the music had ceased, and a great desolate silence filled the hall. Silence and loneliness; the two came side by side, for when Paul turned and looked at Rhoda they were alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

The thorn comes forth with the point forward.

GEORGE HERBERT.

WHEN Anthony Dexter reached Heather Den, he found old Wichelow sitting in the room smoking. It was dark, for Anthony had wandered a long time on the heath before seeking the shelter of the house; but a sort of instinct, aided by a smell of tobacco, assured him that the old man occupied his usual seat on the settle, and in

a moment, and as Anthony was about to leave the room, Boniface spoke.

"Well?" he said.

"Oh, you are there, Mr. Wichelow?" Anthony answered. "I am going upstairs, so I will not disturb you."

"Do not go; I want to talk to you."

"I am too tired to talk," said Anthony irritably.

He spoke truly; he was more than tired, he was exhausted by the emotional excitement and the mental conflict he had passed through. The reaction brought him unstrung nerves and a sense of bitter humiliation.

"I know," said old Wichelow, "that you do not like the darkness. You shall have light."

He rose, and began to feel along the mantelpiece for the matchbox.

"No, I do not want light. To-night the darkness is better."

Anthony sat down, lacking the energy to resist Boniface Wichelow's importunity.

"Ah!" said the old man, "you have told me what I wanted to know."

"How? What do you mean?"

Anthony spoke languidly; there was no room in his mind for any interests but his own.

"I know," said Boniface, "why Paul made you go to Fanelands to-day."

"What do you mean?" asked Anthony again, but his words now were sharp and quick.

"He thinks himself"—the old man spoke slowly, pausing now and again between his words to take a whiff of his pipe—"he thinks himself the strongest—the strongest of all."

"I do not understand you."

"No? Well—but I thought you were not all fool."

"I am obliged to you."

"I suppose so."

The old man was silent for a little and Anthony also did not speak.

"All people are fools," Boniface said after a time, "who care much about anything except money. That you have by you, and you can count it and keep it."

"Till you die."

"I am speaking of life, not death," said old Wichelow, with a sudden sharpness in his voice. "And, besides, what else can you take with you when you die? Not music, or—love."

Anthony gave a short laugh.

"Certainly not love."

"Rhoda's mother," Boniface went on, "she was just such another—all for music and reading and flightiness." The old man's voice sank suddenly. "It couldn't save her at the end. If she had put by, it would have been different."

"She was in want?"

"Oh, no, no, no! She lived here. I gave her everything—the neighbours will tell you—everything she wanted. And Rhoda will tell you—she was fifteen; five years ago it was—Rhoda will tell you all I spent and gave her. For the books, nobody could blame me for selling the books. It was such a long illness."

Anthony sat and listened abstractedly; the old man's sudden garrulousness wearied him. But the outburst of talk was succeeded by a long spell of silence, and by and by, as a fuller consciousness of the present broke in upon his thoughts, Anthony began to wish that his companion would speak again; anything was better than the sense of watchfulness that always seemed to accompany Boniface Wichelow's dumb presence in the

darkness. But before the silence had grown oppressive the old man broke it.

"So it is not strong enough," he said—"the music?"

"For what?"

"To woo her away."

Anthony's heart beat a little faster.

"Did you hope——" he began, and stopped.

"Yes, I hoped it might."

"Do you mean," said Anthony after a little pause, and with a half-laugh, "that you wished—hoped that I might induce this girl, who has bewitched me, to give up her lover for me?"

"Ay. If you had," old Wichelow went on after a minute, "I would have given you a half or—or a third of my savings."

"You have not done much," said Anthony, "to further your hopes."

"There is a sort of justice in Paul, but no mercy," was all the answer old Wichelow gave.

There was another space of silence, and then Anthony rose to his feet.

"I leave you to-morrow," he said.

"You must pay for the week," said Boniface.

Anthony did not answer. He went upstairs to his room and shut himself into a lonely darkness; then he abandoned himself to a passion of misery and self-reproach. He knew now that the feeling he had toward Rhoda Wichelow was not curiosity or interest, but love; the knowledge had come to him fully in that moment when, looking back from the organ into the dusk behind, he had seen her moving with slow steps toward him; and with the knowledge had come the temptation to see how far the power of the music would lead her; whether it were strong enough in its wildest, if not in its highest, form, to win her from the lover

she had known all her days, to himself, the lover who appealed to her through the emotional instincts which his art had awakened and excited in her complex nature. He suffered now with all the keenness that a vain nature endures when it falls below its own opinion of itself ; for Anthony, though his standard of the conduct of life was not high, being that of the ordinary man of the world, felt that he had sinned against the accepted code of honour ; he suffered from the mortification of failure, and failure in a contest with Paul Garnet was unspeakably bitter to him ; he suffered from the hopelessness of a love that had all the fiery passion of a highly-strung, emotional temperament. All night he did not rest, or even seek to rest ; his desire and his one dread equally was to leave the place that was filled for him now with humiliation and suffering, and yet had held for him keener happiness than any he had hitherto known outside his artistic inner life.

The night wore away and the morning came, and in its gray light the strained physical powers gave way to the exhaustion that inevitably succeeds violent emotion ; and Anthony fell asleep on the floor, his head lying close to the little table on which, before his arrival, Rhoda Wichelow had placed a glass of flowers to greet the musician of her dream.

CHAPTER XV.

And, behold, at evening tide trouble.

ISAIAH.

THE next morning Anthony and Rhoda did not meet. The hay had all been carried now, and there was no need for the girl to continue to help the workers in the fields ; but when Anthony came down to breakfast—

rather late, for he feared, while he yet hoped to see her—she had already gone out. His intention had been to leave Heather Den early in the morning; yet he could not make up his mind to go; and when dinner-time came he had begun no preparations for his journey.

Rhoda did not come in; Anthony sat at the table, hardly tasting his food, his eyes casting continual glances at the window, his ears straining to catch some sound of her coming.

"You leave to-day?" said old Boniface, looking at him across the table.

"Yes."

"You should have started after breakfast then. The only fast train in the day leaves Breybridge at twelve o'clock."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"You wouldn't have started any the earlier if I had; you would have stayed on just the same."

"No, I——" began Anthony, and stopped; he knew that old Wichelow spoke the truth.

"I will wait now till to-morrow morning," he said presently.

"You will not see Rhody," said the old man; and after a pause he added: "The slow train goes at five."

"You mean that your granddaughter will not come back till I have gone?"

Old Wichelow, slowly munching a bit of bread, nodded his head with an almost imperceptible nod, but did not speak.

"I will stay at Breybridge to-night," said Anthony. "I shall be out of Miss Wichelow's way this afternoon."

He rose from the table, and went up to his room to pack his clothes; but instead of packing, he sat down

on the window-ledge and looked out at the sloping fields and at the woods, and let the time drift by unheeded. It was a changeful day : from time to time the sun shone brilliantly, then was hidden by gray, chasing clouds ; the wind blew with moderate persistent strength that swelled now and again to little angry gusts ; there was a feeling of coming rain in the air. Anthony looked at the fields with the fleeting lights on them, and round the bare, poorly furnished room, and it seemed to him that he had been a very long time at Heather Den, that the whole of his life, his real life, had been lived there, and that all that had gone before had been but a dream, whose unreality only became apparent now that he was awake. He thought of the past years vaguely ; his struggles for a livelihood, then for fame ; his passionate pursuit of his art, and his delight in it, strong enough at times to supply the place of fame, almost of bread ; the success that had begun to dawn upon him ; the sweetness of being recognized ; and it all seemed to him now but dust and ashes in comparison with Rhoda Wichelow's love. The artist in him was sunk in the man, and the artist was far finer and greater than the man part of this man, so that as he sat and thought his heart was full of bitterness, and he could not look beyond his own suffering.

He was roused at last by a knocking at the door, and by Sally's voice telling him that tea was ready. The whole afternoon was gone, and he had done nothing. He called out to the woman that he wanted no tea, that he was about to start, and rising up hastily, he began to pack his clothes into his portmanteau with all speed. A sudden longing came upon him to get away, to escape from the surroundings whose every detail held a memory of the happiness of the last ten days, and of the sufferings and mortification that had followed it ; and

he made his preparations with feverish haste. Still, it was some time before he was ready, and when at last he went down to the kitchen to give Sally directions about sending on his luggage, the light had begun to fade. He stood for a minute outside the door of the room ; there was no sound within, and he did not know whether Boniface Wichelow were there ; but he did not wish to see the old man, and was about to pass on, when a voice said :

“Come in, Mr. Dexter.”

Anthony barely crossed the threshold.

“I am just going,” he said.

“I know.”

The old man was sitting in his usual position on the settle ; its high back kept the light from his face.

“You have used a great many candles,” he said, “sitting up at night—more than I counted on in the agreement.”

“Will a shilling pay the difference ?”

Anthony put his hand in his pocket.

“Ye-yes.”

Anthony put down a shilling on the table.

“Good-bye, Mr. Wichelow,” he said, and turned and left the room.

The old man rose from the settle, went over to the table, and, taking up the money, rung in once and again to satisfy himself that it was good.

Anthony Dexter meanwhile went out of the house, and crossed the road between the heath and the woods. He had to call at the little inn in Fanelands village to order a cart to bring his luggage over to Breybridge, and he took the same path he had taken the afternoon before, when at Paul Garnet’s invitation he had gone down to play the organ at the Hall. There was a fluttering wind among the trees, and the leaves had an

ominous rustle ; the sunset was clouded to-night, and the dusk was making way under the thick curtain of foliage. A solitary bird piped now and again a single plaintive note ; it reminded Anthony of the nightingale he had heard singing alone, on the evening of his arrival, when he had first entered the woods ; and the thought of that other sound that had followed it, the singing of a clear, far-off voice, became so strong that he stopped and, turning his face in the direction of the open space, listened, almost expecting to hear it again. But the voice was dumb ; there was no sound to-night but the heave and sigh of the wind amongst the trees ; and suddenly he covered his face with his hands, feeling that he should never hear that sound again. And with his closed, darkened eyes he saw the form and face of Rhoda Wichelow ; he saw her standing in the midst of her grandfather's labourers, singing, as he had seen her first ; and he saw her as he had seen her under the music's spell, when the mystery of her face had seemed about to reveal itself in word or act. And then, with a groan, he let his hands drop quickly, and he turned about again, and he saw her standing before him.

Her eyes had a startled look, her lips were parted ; it seemed as though she had turned the angle of the path, and had come upon him suddenly, unawares, and in the moment in which he looked round. They stood and looked at one another, and neither of them spoke. Then at last Anthony drew a long breath.

"You must have known," he said, "that I loved you."

She bent her head very slightly ; she made no sound, but her lips moved and seemed to form the words "I knew."

"And I love you, must love you, through all the hell that life will be without you ; and I shall never see you again."

Still she did not speak ; only her lips made "No."

He stood and looked at her, his mouth trembling.

"Do you know," he burst out suddenly and fiercely, "that you have spoiled and wrecked my life? Till I knew you, the music was enough, and more than enough, for me ; I lived in it, and with it, and for it, in a glory and a happiness that belonged only to it and me. And now——" He broke off. "Why did you do it?" he cried ; "I say, why did you do it?"

Then she spoke.

"Ah, why?" Her voice vibrated as though some trembling hand swept the chords that gave her speech ; her eyes had a pleading, wonderful look that he had never seen in them before. "I warned you," she said ; "I told you that you must not come into and stir my life. I was not made for you, nor you for me."

"By God !" he said ; "but we were made each one for the other. The stuff whereof I am fashioned, of that are you fashioned too ; the music that holds for me life, and the meaning of life, works in your being too ; the God that shows himself to me in sound, raises you in sound to heaven too ; the devil that is the shadow of that God, calling to me in harmonies of madness, calls to you too. Is it so, Rhoda? Do I speak the truth or no?"

"You speak the truth," she said.

"And we were made the one for the other?"

She shook her head.

"I was made for Paul."

"But if——"

She stopped him.

"You are the musician of my dream," she said, "but only of my dream. In the life that I have always lived, and shall still live on, I belong to Paul. Hear me," she went on, as he would have spoken. "From my baby-

hood he has ruled me ; even during the years when he was away at school and travelling, he was still the centre of my life ; from my childhood I have never thought of, never wished for, any husband but Paul. There is an affinity between us that——”.

“That ceases where the strongest part of you begins.”

“I do not know.”

“Is it not true that the part of you that music touches you have kept shut away from him ?”

She bent her head.

“And in that part,” he said, “the keynote of your nature, you belong to me.”

“In that, perhaps,” she said, “but in nothing else.”

“You could not love me—as a man, not apart from, but beside the music ?”

She looked at him with her most secret face ; for a long time—it seemed to him a very long time—she did not speak ; and while she waited, the wind, rising in a gust, swept through the trees with a rushing sound.

“To be with you,” she said at last, “is like a dream, a delirium ; to be with Paul is rest. He holds the tempest part of me in check ; with him I shall live long years of peace, confident in his strength.”

“And with me——”

She made a little movement with her hands.

“With you it would be ecstasy—for a very little while, and then—I do not know. It could not last.”

“Choose the short ecstasy,” he cried, “and come with me now. Come, Rhoda ! and let it last or die. A short, full joy is worth an eternity of dull, gray peace.”

He came quite close to her ; he reached out his hand to touch her. She was very pale ; the pupils of her eyes dilated, looking forth from beneath the lids that drooped, half hiding them ; in her face lay all the composite charm, all the strange possibilities of the face that

had won his curious admiration in the print in his room at home. Her breath came quickly and heavily, her bosom heaved ; almost she seemed to lean, to draw toward him ; then suddenly, and with a cry, she started back, threw out her arms and turned her face skyward.

“‘And I looked and behold a pale horse,’” she said ; “‘and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.’”

She stood looking up through the waving leaves to the sky, her arms outstretched as on a cross ; and on her face gradually the troubled, complex look gave way to the exaltation that Anthony had seen there when he first saw the face ; and he drew back and stood abashed, and waited. At last her arms dropped, and she turned to him.

“All the night,” she said, “I was on my knees. I knew that though I went away so as not to see you, I still should see you ; and I knew how it would be. And I knew”—her voice dropped—“that if I went with you it would mean a dying of my soul, and that hell would follow.” She moved a step forward. “Good-bye, Anthony Dexter,” she said. “Our lives part here.”

“Must they part ?” he asked.

His low voice trembled so that the words were hardly audible ; she did not heed, perhaps did not hear, them.

“Let me pass !” she said.

He drew to one side, and she passed him by, and was lost to him amongst the trees.

He stood for a long time after she had gone without moving, looking still along the path by which she had left him ; and all the time the wind blew, rustling the leaves ; and it seemed to him that it was the rustle of her garments that he heard as she fled on and on, further

and further away from him. At last, faint, far off, like the echo of the voice he had known, he seemed to hear sweet notes that came to him scant and broken, in the pauses of the wind. He bent his head to listen ; and then he knew that in the space amidst the trees, divided from him by a distance that had no measurement in space, Rhoda Wichelow stood among the toiling people whose lot she tried to share, and sang the song he had first hear her sing ; for dimly, but with a fulness of sound that travelled more surely than the scattered single notes, rose the longing cry of the refrain :

But oh for the rest beyond !

Then he turned, and walked on through the woods ; and so Anthony Dexter left Heather Den.

PART II.

PAUL GARNET'S MARRIAGE.

Fuor della queta, nell' aura che trema ;
E vengo in parte ove non è che luca.

DANTE.

CHAPTER I.

What thou seest
Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream ;
A dream itself, yet less perhaps, than that
Thou call'st reality.

SHELLEY.

IN the late autumn Rhoda Wichelow and Paul Garnet were married ; and it was through almost leafless trees that Rhoda walked up from Fanelands Hall to pay her first visit to Boniface Wichelow at Heather Den. The house was all shut up when she reached it, the windows securely fastened, the door barred, and it was some time before she could gain an entrance. At last, by dint of tapping on the kitchen window, she brought Sally forth from the scullery, and presently the back door was opened.

"Why, miss—ma'am !" exclaimed the woman. "I never thought to look on you to-day."

"And why not, Sally ?"

"Married but two days ? I thought surely you 'ld take a week to settle in."

"The settling was done beforehand."

"And looking just the same ! The same frock—nobody 'ld believe it had took place."

"Did you think I should come in my bridal gown, Sally ?" asked Rhoda. "How is my grandfather ?"

"Him mopes."

Rhoda stepped into the kitchen. She had been standing on the threshold during the short interchange of questions and answers.

"Is he in?"

"For sure."

Rhoda stood for a minute holding out her bare hands toward the feeble blaze of a small fire in the midst of the large hearth. Then she took her way out of the kitchen, across the stone passage, and into the room.

Old Boniface sat on the settle; he did not move or speak as the girl entered; coming a step or two nearer to him, she saw that he was asleep. There was no fire in the room; a charred piece of wood lay black amidst white ashes between the iron dogs; the air felt damp and chill. Rhoda took a few rapid steps, and laid her hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"Grandfather!" she said. "Grandfather, wake up!"

Old Wichelow started, and sat suddenly upright, turning his head from side to side, and beating the air feebly with his hands.

"Help!" he cried, in a quavering voice. "Help! Ah, Rhody!"—a look of relief came into his troubled face, followed by one of scowling displeasure—"why did you fright and startle me, girl?" he said.

"I did nothing to frighten you," Rhoda answered. "It is bad for you to sleep in this cold air."

She left the room, and presently returned with her arms full of wood. She kneeled down by the hearth, and began to rake the ashes together.

"I will not have a fire, Rhody!" cried the old man. "It is too warm; the winter is not yet."

"It is biting cold," Rhoda answered, "and damp."

"I cannot afford——"

"It is dangerous," said Rhoda, "to sleep in the cold, for an old man like you: you might never wake again."

"Oh, no, no! Then light the fire, Rhody—just a

little—not all those logs. And yet—I don't know ; now that Paul has taken all that money away from me, I can't afford it ; firing costs much, very much.”

Rhoda did not answer till she had kindled a flame, strengthened it with the bellows, and fed it with many logs ; then, when a leaping blaze made the whole dull room warm and bright, she came and stood by the old man's side.

“The little money that you gave to Paul,” she said, “belonged to me of right. My mother left her books to me ; you sold them ; the money they fetched is mine.”

“Her illness,” the old man broke in—“her long illness——”

“She served you well when she was in health,” said Rhoda, “as well as I have served you, and I know that I have earned all you have ever given me. You have wealth enough, I know, to have lived in the position in which you were born ; but yet, because my father left us penniless, my mother and I submitted to live according to your will, and we earned what you chose to give us. My mother's books were hers to leave to me ; I hold the price of them rightly, and it is not much.”

“It is pounds,” said Boniface—“pounds and pounds.”

“Forty-three pounds,” said Rhoda. She bent down to the old man so that she could see his face. “Paul has given it all to me,” she said, “and I will give it back to you, shilling by shilling, if you will have a fire here all day till the spring—a shilling for every fire.”

The old man's eyes grew brighter.

“All day, Rhody ? it burns a lot all day.”

“The wood belongs to you ; it costs nothing, and it is there, cut and piled up, ready for burning.”

“Have you brought a shilling for to-day, Rhody ?”

“The day is more than half over ; but I will begin

to-day." Rhoda took a shilling from her pocket. "The fire must be big," she said.

The old man took the coin eagerly, and held it tightly clasped in his left hand. Rhoda went over to the hearth, and put on another log ; old Wichelow writhed in his seat as he watched her, but he kept his lips tightly pressed together, and said nothing. By and by Rhoda got up from the hearth and walked across the floor to the curtained doorway.

"Where are you going?" said old Wichelow from his settle.

The girl did not answer, but drew aside the curtain, and went into the room that had been her own. It was very bare now ; the rugs had been taken from the floor, and the books, with the shelves that held them, from the walls ; only the old piano remained, and one chair standing lonely before it. Rhoda stood just within the doorway, and looked into the desolate room ; the dusk was thickening and half hid its emptiness, but a chill loneliness filled it from floor to ceiling ; rain had begun to fall, and beat gently against the window with a soft, pattering sound. She did not stand still long ; she had come with a definite purpose ; and soon she moved over to the piano and felt along the top of it with her hand. Her hymn-book, the one from which she had chosen most of the hymns she sang with the labourers, had been left behind at Heather Den when her other possessions had been taken down to the Hall ; it should still be lying in its usual place, and she had come over now to find it. She passed her hand gently along, and found what she sought, and then she turned to go back to the door. But as she turned, her foot came in contact with some hard substance that rolled away as she touched it ; she stooped down, and, feeling on the floor, found presently something thin and long,

which she took back with her into the room. The blaze of firelight let her see that it was a pencil-case, and she knew at once to whom it belonged, for she had seen Anthony Dexter use it.

"Grandfather," she said, "where does Mr. Dexter live? Do you remember?"

"You've done with Mr. Dexter now," answered old Wichelow sourly.

"I have found something belonging to him," Rhoda said. "I suppose I should send it to him."

"What is it? Is it of any value?"

"I don't know." Rhoda held out her hand. "It is this."

"It is silver," said the old man, taking the pencil-case, and bending forward toward the light of the fire. "It is worth money; he ought to pay a reward for it."

"Give it back to me," said Rhoda quickly.

She almost snatched the pencil-case from her grandfather's grasp, and put it into her pocket; and in the same moment came a sharp knocking at the outer door.

Old Wichelow started; Rhoda crossed the room to go out into the passage.

"Who is it?" cried the old man. "Don't open, Rhody, till you have looked out and seen who is there."

"It is Paul," Rhoda answered; "I saw him pass the window."

She went on along the stone flags and unbarred and unbolted the door; it took her a minute or two to do, for the bolts were stiff, and the bar a heavy one. Paul entered with the rain dripping from his hat and lying in close moisture on his coat.

"You are wet," said Rhoda as her hand brushed his sleeve.

"It is raining heavily," he answered.

"Why did you come?"

"For that reason ; because you would have been soaked through before you got halfway home."

They entered the room, and Rhoda saw that he carried her thick cloak across his arm.

"Thank you, Paul," she said.

He looked at her with a smile—the smile of possession.

"Come and dry yourself at the fire," said old Wichelow. "It is a fine fire."

"No, we are going home now," Paul answered.

He put the cloak round Rhoda's shoulders as she stood in front of the hearth. She turned to the old man.

"Good-night, grandfather," she said.

"Good-night. Good-night, Paul."

Paul nodded from the other side of the fireplace.

"Good-night. Come, Rhoda."

"Rhody ! One minute !" the old man called as the girl passed through the doorway.

"Go on, Paul," she said, and turned and came back to the settle.

"Stoop down—close," said old Wichelow. "Shall you be back to-morrow ?"

"Hardly."

"And the shilling ? I cannot have a fire if you do not bring the shillings."

"I will bring them, a shilling for every fire, when I come again. Sally will tell me if you have kept your promise."

Rhoda walked hastily across the room and out into the passage ; the outer door was open, and Paul's head and shoulders were outlined against the rainy sky, the lower part of his figure indistinguishable against the dark background of the heath.

"What a dreary evening !" Rhoda cried.

"Would you rather be staying safely here instead of coming home with me?"

Paul turned back from the door as he spoke; the fading, uncertain light came in and fell upon Rhoda's face. She looked up quickly.

"Safely?" she said. "Safety lies with you." Her face took on its softest look. "Ah, Paul!" she said, "surely you know I am glad to go with you."

She pulled the hood of her cloak over her head, and stepped out on to the doorstep. Paul followed her, and together they went forth, two dark, muffled figures, struggling through the wind and the rain.

CHAPTER II.

Bring home the bride again ;
Bring home the triumph of our victory,
SPENSER.

IN the woods the moisture was already beginning to drip from the bare branches, as the impatient wind tossed them up and down. Paul went first along the narrow path between the trees, and Rhoda followed him. Suddenly he stumbled, drew up short, and almost fell; a fallen bough lay in the way, and in the dim clouded light he had not seen it till he touched it with his foot.

"What is it, Paul?" Rhoda asked, a startled tone in her voice.

"That branch," Paul answered, "that I have told your grandfather about so often; it has come down at last."

The two figures stood for a minute side by side before stepping over the bough; it lay in an angle of the path, which at this point took a sharp turn to the left. It was along this path that Rhoda had come on the evening

on which Anthony Dexter had left Heather Den ; it was on the spot on which she now stood that, with a passing, desperate courage, she had gained the strength to cast him out of her life. The scene came back to her now ; the impression of it was so strong that it mingled with and dimmed the consciousness of her actual present state. This man standing beside her, was it Anthony or Paul ? She held her breath ; something of the horror and the sweetness of those moments of indecision took life again ; something of the positive physical sense of giddiness and confusion produced by a great temptation set her brain awlirl. Then Paul moved ; and she let her breath come forth with a rush, and put out her hand and touched his arm.

"Paul," she said quickly. There was almost a question in her tone.

"There is no danger now," he said.

She knew that he spoke of the fallen bough, yet his words seemed an answer to her thoughts.

"No, the danger is over," she answered.

Paul raised her in his arms, and lifted her over the branch.

"Walk beside me now," he said ; "the path grows wider here."

Rhoda walked on by his side ; and as she went, the sense of confidence which his presence always gave her, the consciousness of a strength of will and purpose greater and more consistent than her own, quieted the sudden emotion that had risen up within her, and soothed her into calmness.

It was dark when Paul and Rhoda reached Fanelands Hall. The wind was more sullen and less boisterous in the low-lying sheltered land about the house than on the heath and the high ground about Heather Den ; the rain fell with less of driving force. The husband

and wife went through the garden round to the side door, and entered the narrow passage leading to the hall. The hall was dimly lighted ; only one lamp on a table near the fireplace sent forth beams that did not reach to either end. But the firelight helped it, and in the glow made by the burning logs Rhoda stood and shook the rain from her cloak. Her face was aglow with the wind ; little drops of moisture shone on the ruffled hair about her brow ; her eyes were both soft and bright. The hood was still on her head, making a dark, soft frame for her brilliant face. She shook her head to loosen it, and looking up, met Paul's eyes.

"What do I look like ?" she asked, laughing.

He answered her:-

"Like Paul Garnet's wife."

The hood fell back from her head ; she unfastened the cloak and let it slip off on to the floor ; she came close to her husband, and stood before him, looking up into his face.

"Paul," she said, "I was meant to be your wife, and you were meant for my husband. I love you ; I could never love any man but you."

Paul looked at her strangely.

"You could," he said, "but you never shall."

"What do you mean ?" she asked.

"If I had been quite sure of you," he answered, "I should never have loved you so deeply—nor so long. I sometimes wonder how you found it possible so to fulfil my ideal of what a woman ought to be."

"I do not understand," she said.

"You know the ordinary heroine of the ordinary man ?" he asked.

She shook her head slightly.

"Tell me."

"The ordinary heroine is faithful," Paul said. "She

loves one man, once and forever, and whether he is near or far, alive or dead. You are not faithful."

"Am I not?"

She spoke gravely, as though she accepted his verdict, yet with a touch of pleading in her face, as though she deprecated its positive assertion.

"The ordinary heroine is submissive——" Paul went on.

"That I am," she broke in quickly.

"Is submissive," Paul continued, "because it is natural to her and her duty—being a woman. You are not made so."

"How am I made?" Rhoda asked with a dawning smile.

"The ordinary heroine of the ordinary man," Paul said, without answering her question, "is never tempted from the side of the man—the ordinary man—to whom she has given her allegiance, is never ruffled by passions that clash with duty, has no wild impulses, no capacity for evil, is a good woman, conveniently calm, and coldly pure."

"And I?" Rhoda said after a moment's silence.

"You are not faithful; you are not submissive; you are not good with the unfailing goodness that knows no temptation to sin. If you had been I should have loved you, inevitably, for your beauty—though in that case your beauty would never have had the distinction it carries now; but it would have passed, the love, and quickly. But, as you are, you are a woman that is never won. You submit to me now, because you feel that I am stronger than you; but if I became less strong would you hold to me? Not you. You love me now, or almost love me, and you will continue to love me, and to lead a life free from reproach or blame. But if you were thrown into the midst of temptation, and if I

were not by, could I be sure you would come forth unscathed?"

"Could you be sure of anybody?" she whispered.

"Yes, for temptation is relative; there are some people for whom it hardly exists. But you are not one of them, and it is just for that that I love you. I never could be quite sure what you would do; there would be always something to control and conquer in you. You are not most men's ideal, dear heart, but you are mine; and I will keep you safe in the place where you are set."

"I know," she said, "I know you will."

All the laughing mirth was gone from her face now; its usual inscrutable expression covered it again, mingled with a touch of meditative sadness. She turned away from her husband, and went slowly out of the hall and up the staircase. Passing along the corridor above, she could see through the little inside windows into the hall below. Paul, standing by the fireplace, was just beneath her, and so was hidden from her view; but the lamp-light, and the leaping, varying light of the fire, fell upon the large organ, mute and closed. Its pipes rose up high, to the level of her gaze; she looked across at them with a curious feeling in her heart; they were to her like live things, prisoned in a silence that was allied with death.

But she looked at them only for a very little while; very soon she passed on to the end of the corridor and entered her room. It was large and square, with one window looking out to the front and another to the side of the house. Just now it was dark, and the two windows showed spaces of heavy, fleeting clouds. Rhoda found matches and lighted a candle. She put it on the dressing table, and stood before the mirror, looking at the reflection of her face, illumined by the flickering upward light.

"Paul is right," she said to herself; "I am weak. But he is strong, as he said, and the grace of God—surely it is strong; I shall be safe. And, besides, it is all over."

She turned away from the mirror and crossed the room; she put her hand into her pocket to find the key of the locked drawer in which she kept the money that Paul had induced her grandfather to give up to her. She found the key, and something else with it—the pencil-case belonging to Anthony Dexter. She had forgotten that it was there. When she saw it she let it fall upon the floor, and stood a few paces away from it, looking at it with a kind of fear.

"I ought to send it to him," she thought. "Yet how? And I have forgotten the name of the street he lives in."

She seemed to hear a sound far off in the house, a footstep on the stairs. She went forward quickly and picked up the pencil-case; then, unlocking a drawer in the wardrobe, she laid it far back out of sight, behind the little heap of gold that Paul had given her. The sound on the staircase died away again; nobody came near the room. Rhoda went over to one of the windows, still uncurtained, and stood looking out at the dark, gloomy sky.

CHAPTER III.

Each hath his fortune in his breast.

SPENSER.

THE winter drew on. At Heather Den old Boniface Wichelow, crouching over the fire that brought him a shilling every day, found the long, lonely evenings full of dreariness. He missed the companionship he had been used to for so many years; he missed all that

Rhoda had done for him, and her help in the management of the farm; and he suffered also a more positive trouble, the discomfort of an unquiet spirit when it is left alone with itself.

It was very cold at Heather Den; the winds blew over and about the house with all the force gathered in an unchecked rush across the heath; the frost froze the pipes on the outside walls, and entered the rooms and turned the water in the ewers into ice. Sally shivered in her bed at night, and cursed—though the curse remained unformulated in her heart—her master's "closeness." Old Wichelow shivered, too, but with the inward satisfaction that by the shaking of his worn old frame he was saving wood and coals.

At Fanelands Hall the cold was less intense: the wind strove angrily in the woods, crying out with moaning voice against the trees that checked its course; yet the trees stood bravely, like a guard around the house, and gave it partial shelter; and when the still frost came, it could not force its way through the thick old walls and bite into the rooms, as it did in the lonely, unprotected house upon the heath. And at Fanelands big fires were always blazing; in Rhoda's bedroom, with its windows facing north and west; in her sitting-room downstairs, where the firelight, dancing and glowing on the white-panelled walls, made winter seem a joyful and lovely thing; in the great wide fireplace in the hall, where the sparks rushed up in streams from the logs, and the light of the flames fell upon and mocked the organ's dark, mute bulk. Often Rhoda, sitting alone beside the hearth, waiting for Paul to come in from his day's shooting, with no light but the firelight to battle with the early winter darkness, looked at the organ with half-curious, half-fearful eyes, and wondered if it would ever speak again; for Paul had

not touched it since his marriage, and it stood in silence and neglect. Sometimes, looking round from the ruddy brightness of the fire into the moving lights and shades that hung about the pipes and the frame, she almost seemed to see the face of the musician who had given it a brief, wild space of life; and once she rose up and moved a few steps across the hall, with the feeling strong upon her that if she uncovered the keys, somehow the notes would be pressed down and the pipes would breathe forth sound.

She lived softly now compared with her former rough, hard life at Heather Den. There were not many servants at Fanelands, but enough to let her live at ease, and Paul Garnet liked to give his wife as many luxuries as his straitened means could afford; she wore more costly and beautiful clothes than she had ever seen before; there was a refinement and grace in her surroundings which were new to her. She enjoyed the novelty; the sensuous part of her grasped eagerly at the gratification of those desires, the existence of which in her own nature she had not hitherto suspected. It was pleasant to sit in a room where at every turn her eyes rested on something that pleased them; it was even more pleasant to exchange the short, scanty frocks of her girlhood for gowns of soft texture and skilful make, that made her seem to herself, when she looked at her likeness in the glass, like some beautiful creature whom she had never known truly till now, familiar yet strange. Yet, as the days went by, time began to lie heavy on her hands, and she longed sometimes for her old rough life at the farm, free in the midst of bondage, full of interest, though narrow and hard. Almost every day she went up to Heather Den to see her grandfather and take him the shilling, the getting of which came to be the chief enjoyment of his life; and often she would

go into the farmyard and through the fields, talking to the hard-working men and women amongst whom the greater number of her days had been passed.

"It's harder than ever now you be gone," old Micah Yates said to her one day. "It do be like the song says:

"Sorrow and toil, and neither let nor stay."

"I am sorry, Micah," she answered; "and all the more because I cannot come back."

"For sure not, ma'am. When a woman takes a man, by her man she must bide, let come what will in the way." The old man paused in his digging, and resting one hand on his spade, raised the other to his head, and slowly scratched it. "And besides," he said, "you never could come back—not to what you was—not if it was ever so."

"Why not?" Rhoda spoke almost sharply; there was something in the old man's words and voice that gave her a sense of being shut out of the world she knew best.

"You're different," said Micah, "and none goes back to what they was, when once they is what they wasn't. You're different dressed, for one thing; you're like the ladies I used to see when I was young enough to go to Breybridge of a market day."

"Clothes don't alter me," Rhoda said.

The old man shook his head. "It's as it should be," he said. "We allus knew it, all of us, that you was a lady and above the likes of we—as I hope we behaved to show it in a proper way; a born lady, the same as in the singing, fit to teach and us to learn."

"When the days get long, I will come and sing again," Rhoda said.

"It's a comfort, for sure," said Micah, "and I don't

“speak alone when I say it. You was allus a sort of angel to us; we all looked up to you—and does still, though being raised higher gives us further to look.”

“A sort of angel!” The words rang in Rhoda’s ears as she took her way home through the woods. She had been used to feel sometimes, in these old days at the farm, that as life went on she might rise aboce the trials and temptations of the world as she knew it then, and become, not an angel, indeed, but a veritable servant of the Lord, leading a life according to the teachings of Jeremy Taylor and Henry Law. But Paul had told her that she would sin easily, and that goodness was far away from her; and she knew now that in what had formerly been her great spiritual outlet, in the music which had seemed to raise and purify her, there lurked a spirit of evil, which had already shown itself in temptation. What would become of her? As she entered Fanelands she heard the report of Paul’s gun in the covert below the house. She took heart; with Paul she was safe, and the great temptation lay behind her.

That evening Rhoda did not glance back at the organ as she waited in the hall for her husband to come in.

CHAPTER IV.

When all sins grow old, covetousness is young.

GEORGE HERBERT.

It was Christmas Day. In the room at Heather Den old Boniface Wichelow sat huddled over the fire; he had had his Christmas dinner—a lean hen which had ceased to lay—and he now sat down to digest it, and to enjoy the one luxury which he allowed himself on occasions of unusual festivity, a pipe.

It was a still, frosty day, with a wintry sun shining

cold on the bare heath and the brown branches of the woods. Everything was very quiet, for Sally had gone to dine and spend the afternoon with friends in the village below, and there was no sound in the bare, cold house but the faint ticking of the kitchen clock and the crackling of the wood on the hearth.

Old Wichelow smoked slowly, lengthening out the enjoyment as far as possible, and getting the utmost that was to be out of every whiff; but at length the pipe went out. He drew and drew but there was nothing more to burn in it, and at last, with a sigh, he got up and put it back in its place on the mantelpiece.

When he had done this he stood for several minutes looking into the fire, glancing round the room, out of the window, and back at the fire again. After a while he went into the passage and lifted the bar across the outer door; he entered the kitchen and saw that the back door was locked and the windows both securely fastened; then he returned to the room. He went over to the windows and drew the curtains across them, leaving in each window a small uncovered space, sufficient to let a scanty stream of light enter the room, but not wide enough to allow anyone outside to see in. Having satisfied himself that he could not be overlooked, he walked slowly across the floor to the opposite wall, stopping now and again to listen for sounds that never broke the stillness, and at last he drew the red curtain aside and entered the room that had been Rhoda's.

Here, too, his first care was to screen the window; then he shut the door; and then he went over to the corner where Rhoda's table had formerly stood. There was a loose stone in the flooring; it was easily detached, but it was heavy, and the old man struggled with it for a minute or two before he could lift it from its place. Beneath it was a hole hollowed out in the earth, damp

and irregularly shaped; in the hole was an old tobacco-pouch and many little packets of varying size, wrapped in paper that was mildewed and rotten; a worm wriggled in and out amongst the packets and slid against the old man's hand as he put it cautiously into the hole. He drew out all the contents one by one, first the paper packets, and at the last the old pouch; he spread his handkerchief on the floor and put everything into it. Then he replaced the stone, and, carrying the loaded handkerchief carefully with both hands, returned to the room.

He placed his burden on the settle and left it there a minute while he went across to one of the windows and looked out. There was no sign of life visible on the broad heath; no moving thing broke the expanse of loneliness; old Wichelow replaced the curtain and returned to the settle. Then he knelt down and worshipped; with the full undivided worship which a man gives only when the god of his devotions is a reality to him, and not a tradition.

Boniface Wichelow's god was money; he served it faithfully; when he had an opportunity of coming into the presence of his deity, of entering into communion with it, his heart grew warm with fervour.

Kneeling before the settle, he undid the packets one by one; the paper tore away in many of them and let the sovereigns roll out before he could unfold it. In little heaps of varying height he ranged them side by side along the seat; last of all he opened the tobacco-pouch and took out a roll of banknotes, yellow and slightly damp, but protected from positive harm by their india-rubber covering.

He counted them all, the notes first, and then the little piles of gold, slowly, his fingers touching them with a lingering touch that showed they loved their

task. When each sovereign had passed separately through his hands, he began to brighten them, rubbing them against the sleeve of his coat to remove the film of damp that had dimmed their surface.

"Still, it doesn't hurt them," he muttered. "It's the only thing the damp can't touch, is gold. The notes—well——"

He took the notes and spread them one by one on the extreme edge of the circle of firelight; he felt them every now and again with his hand to see if the damp were drawn out of them; he watched the sparks anxiously, lest one should chance to find its way so far from the hearth.

Kneeling thus in the half-darkness that covered most of the room, his clean-cut, eager old face catching the moving light of the fire, the moments, as they passed silently by, held each for him a curious, half-fearful delight, the keenness of his pleasure being held in check by a latent terror, lest by some untoward and unlooked-for chance his solitude should be broken in upon.

By and by he collected the notes together again and laid them carefully on the settle; then he took from one of the drawers of the dresser a sheet of newspaper, and, returning to his first place, kneeled down once more and began to tear the paper into many pieces, and to wrap up the sovereigns anew. He forgot his surroundings as he became more and more absorbed in counting and arranging his wealth; he forgot his fear of interruption; he forgot everything but himself and his god. There were words running in his mind that he had heard or read somewhere—he did not remember nor consider where or when: "Where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Those were the words; he chuckled to himself as he said them again and again, thinking of that hole

in the ground where moth and rust could do but little harm, and which thieves would never discover. The words took a sort of rhythm as they repeated themselves; he began to count the sovereigns to its flow, a sovereign to each word: "Where—neither—moth—nor—rust—doth—corrupt—and—where—thieves——"

In the midst of the silence, broken only by the whispering, pausing voice, came a loud, sudden sound, a knocking at the outer door. The old man started, and a look of confused terror destroyed the rapt delight that had possessed his face. Still kneeling, his head half turned toward the door, his hands stretched out over the settle as though to cover and protect the treasure that lay there, the light of the fire, burnt low now, shining faintly on his pallid, frightened face, he listened anxiously, making no sound or movement.

The knocking was repeated, and again repeated, and then went on in a long, continuous rapping. After a minute the old man's power of thought came back to him; quickly, and with hands that trembled, he took a flat basket that lay in the chimney-corner and swept into it all the sovereigns, loose or in packets, the paper, new and old, and the tobacco-pouch with the notes. With a shambling run he made his way to the dresser, opened a drawer, and emptied the contents of the basket into it. The sovereigns clinked and rang as they fell, and the sound was terrible to him. He covered them with a sheet or two of paper; then he closed the drawer, and went back to the fireside.

He slipped off his shoes, and in his stocking feet went noiselessly along the passage to the outer door. He stood a few paces away from the little grating, and looked through; he could see a portion of a man's cap, and he knew the cap. The knocking became louder. The old man waited for half a minute, hesitating; then

he hurried back to the room again, and put on his shoes; and in the same moment that he glanced round him and gave a quick, anxious look toward the dresser, came a tapping on the window-panes.

Boniface crossed over to the window, and drew aside the curtain. He saw, as he expected to see, the face of Paul Garnet looking in upon him; but he gave a little start as though he were surprised, and, nodding his head with a trembling, deprecating smile, signed to Paul to go to the door. He hurried across the room, and, as quickly as his strength would allow him, unfastened the bolts and let down the bar.

"What the devil's the matter?" said Paul Garnet.

Boniface rubbed his eyes.

"I had fallen asleep," he said. "I did not expect anyone; and Sally being out and the place so quiet—I hope you have not been here long?"

"I don't know what you call long. I have stood here for fifteen infernal minutes!"

Paul spoke calmly, almost carelessly, but his face was ugly with anger. Old Wichelow followed him silently into the room. Paul went over to the window that was still darkened, and drew the curtain aside, thus letting into the room all the light remaining to the short day. Boniface Wichelow took a log from a pile of wood in the chimney-corner and laid it on the sunken fire.

"Come and warm yourself," he said; "you must be cold if you waited so long. The fire got low while I was asleep, but it will soon burn up—very soon."

Paul Garnet came over to the fireside.

"I expected to find Rhoda here," he said.

"She has not been here; I am sure she has not. I have heard nothing—nothing, all the afternoon."

"She started to come here half an hour before I did."

"She has not been—cannot have been; if she had, I should have—awaked."

Paul Garnet sat down in the chimney-corner and looked across at old Boniface as he knelt before the fire, blowing it with the bellows, gently, so as not to make the flames too fierce.

"What devilry have you been up to?" he asked.

"None." The air came from the bellows with such force that the flames rose high with a crackling sound. "By Jehovah! none."

"What have you been doing?"

"I have told you." Boniface laid down the bellows, and retreated to his usual place on the settle. "I was asleep."

"Likely."

"And why not?" The old man, his face shaded by the settle's high back, looked across the blazing logs at the dark face on which the firelight cast a ruddy glow. "Holidays don't come often," he said; "and when you're as old as I am, you'll find perhaps a quiet nap's as great a treat as you can have."

"Shall I draw the curtains, do you think, and bar the door before I begin?"

"I think you will, if you sleep as sound as I do." Something like a smile flitted across old Wichelow's frightened, malicious face; then he added, "It's a lonely place up here, to live all alone. Who's to know who might come prying at the windows, or stealing in at the door?"

"Yes, there are thieves everywhere," said Paul—"everywhere, that is to say, where there's anything to steal."

"I keep no money in the house," said Boniface quickly, "nothing but just enough to pay the little odds and ends. But there are some would murder you

for the sake of the few shillings you might have in your pocket."

"Yes," said Paul; "there are people, I know, who would kill, or help to kill, for the sake of a very little gain."

There was a pause.

"Do you know any such?" Paul asked.

"No, I never—I have lived so much out of the world, as you know; I have never known—seen——"

The voice died away into silence.

"Come here," said Paul Garnet.

"I will not come," the old man breathed.

"You shall, though." Paul's voice took on a great and pitiless scorn. "Do you think I don't know," he said, "that Rhoda's mother owed her death to you?"

"She did not; it is not true. She pined away bit by bit. Am I almighty that I could have saved her? By Jehovah! I was not near her the night she died."

The old man's eyes, screwed up under quivering lids, were full of mingled malignity and terror as he looked from his shadowed seat at the face in the chimney-corner.

"Come here," said Paul again.

"I will not come," Boniface repeated; but he rose from his seat and came with dragging steps a few paces toward the fire.

Paul rose too; he stretched up and took a candle from the mantelpiece, thrust it into the flames, and then held it, lighted, close to the old man's face.

"Did you stint her," he said, "in the things she ought to have had? Did you give her half-quantities for whole ones? Did you grudge her firing, so that the cold nipped and starved her? I know you did, but you must answer me." The old man's face, malicious and obstinate, quivered visibly, but he did not speak.

"Answer," said Paul, "or I will ask you no more till Rhoda comes. Am I right?"

Boniface Wichelow's pursed-up mouth relaxed.

"Ay," he said.

"When Rhoda was taken ill," Paul went on, "and could not go to her mother's room, did you screw and stint still more, knowing that there was nobody to mark or check you?"

Again the wrinkled face quivered, and the old trembling voice gave the same answer as before.

"Ay," it said.

"Did you, on the night on which she died, leave her with no fire to temper the fierceness of the cold?"

"I did not know the frost would be so strong," the old man cried. "I was warm, quite warm. How could I know by the morning she would be dead?"

"Did you leave her with no fire?" asked Paul again.

The answer came as before:

"Ay."

"And it killed her."

"No, it did not—it could not; and, besides, it was not my fault. I did not dream, could not tell. Why should you say it is my fault? How can you tell what I did? and why?"

"I know you," Paul answered. "I knew you then, and I knew what you would be likely to do. When I came that morning, and went into the room where she lay, I knew just what had happened and why. You knew at the time that I knew: all these years you have known it."

The old man repeated Paul's words:

"All these years."

"For which cause you have hated me," said Paul.

For a little while old Boniface did not answer; then

he cast a furtive glance at his questioner's face, and said again:

"Ay."

Paul threw the candle into the fire; the flames swallowed it eagerly, rising high about the logs. Old Wichelow gave a lurch forward, his hands outstretched as though to save it from the blaze.

"Never mind," Paul said; "it has been well paid for out of what you kept back from your son's wife."

He sat down again. The still cold outside had grown harder and blacker; the frosty red had faded from the sky, and left it a dull cold gray; the room was almost dark.

"It was none of my business," Paul said presently, "and the woman was an ailing, miserable creature, who must have died soon in any case; but I could have made it awkward for you if I had liked."

"I almost wonder," old Wichelow's high, unsteady voice answered back out of the darkness, "that you did not like."

"I meant to marry Rhoda," said Paul, "and I did not care to set all the country-side gossiping over her relations. Did you think it was out of regard for you?"

A step sounded in the passage, and in a minute the door of the room opened, and Rhoda came in.

"Are you there, grandfather?" she said. "It is so dark I cannot see."

"I am here," answered Boniface, "and Paul is here."

"Where have you been?" asked Paul, coming out of the chimney-corner. "What has kept you?"

"I went in to see old Micah, and he said that Molly Burns was ill and wanted to see me. Have you been waiting long?"

"Some time," Paul answered, "but it has passed

quickly. Your grandfather and I have had an interesting conversation, although, as it appears, I disturbed him, awoke him from a very deep sleep."

"I had gone to sleep, Rhody," said the old man hurriedly. "I did not think you would come to-day. You told me that Paul's friends from the other side of Breybridge were to drive over to see you."

"They wrote to say they could not come," Rhoda answered, "so I thought I would come and see if you had a good fire, and Paul said he would bring me home."

"The fire is good—very good. You can see how many logs there are, and how it blazes."

"Candle grease makes a fine blaze," said Paul. "The fire was poor till I mended it. Come, Rhoda, we should be going home; the cold is getting more bitter every minute. It will be almost as cold a night as the night your mother died."

"Why do you speak of that, Paul?" Rhoda asked, a tremor in her voice.

"Your grandfather and I have been grieving over her death. Are you ready?"

"Yes; in a minute." Rhoda drew her grandfather aside. "Here are the shillings," she said, "from Tuesday till to-day."

Paul Garnet's sharp ears caught the words.

"What shillings? What are you giving him, Rhoda?"

"Do not tell him," the old man whispered, clutching the girl's arm.

"You are giving him money," said Paul.

"I am giving him nothing that I have not the right to give," Rhoda answered.

"He shall have no more money—least of all yours."

Rhoda did not speak.

"Come here," said Paul. He was standing in the light of the fire. "Come here, my wife, where I can see you."

Rhoda went forward, and stood where the light of the flames showed her face plainly.

"Do you intend to obey me?" Paul asked.

"I am not sure." Rhoda waited a moment, and then added: "It depends."

"On what?"

"On your commands."

"And yet," he said, "you must do my will."

"Quite certainly?"

There was a smile in her eyes, though her voice was grave.

"Quite certainly."

"Then let your will be mine," she said, the smile spreading over all her face.

Paul shook his head.

"Not in this thing."

She looked at him, and as she looked, gradually the smile died away.

"I will obey you," she said.

"What is this money?" he asked.

"Come out into the passage," said Rhoda. "I do not like to see your eyes."

Paul answered her by leading the way out of the room, and she followed him. In the darkness she stood by his side, and said:

"It is only that I give him a shilling for every day that he will keep a good fire burning. He would save the firing and starve himself now I am not here, and I do not like the thought of him sitting in the cold alone."

"In other words, you give him back, bit by bit, the money he had robbed you of. And to keep him warm!"

Paul laughed. "Wait here a minute," he said, "and I will put this right."

He went back into the room. Old Wichelow still stood in the dark corner, holding tightly clasped in his hand the shillings that Rhoda had given him.

"My wife gives you no money," Paul said. "That you know now and for always. If you take so much as a penny from her again, you shall repeat to me, and she shall stand by and hear it, the tale that you told me this afternoon."

"No, no; don't tell Rhody!"

"You understand me?"

"Ay."

Paul went out into the passage again.

"Rhoda!" he called.

There was no answer. Rhoda had gone.

CHAPTER V.

Could I only stand
Between gray moor and gray sky
Where the wind and plovers cry,
And no man is at hand.
And feel the free wind blow
On my rain-wet face, and know
I am free—not yours—but my own.
Free—and alone !

E. NESBIT.

WHEN Paul went back into the room, Rhoda moved down the passage to the outer door and opened it. The passage was very dark, and the darkness seemed weighted with Paul's scorn and anger; she longed to get away from it.

Outside it was almost light, for the snow that covered the heath caught and held the last gleams of daylight;

the frosty sky was strewn with trembling stars; a crescent moon was rising over the woods.

The air was very still and very cold, the young night held a calm purity that was in sweet contrast with Paul's dark wrath and old Wichelow's tremulous greed; and a sudden longing came upon Rhoda to escape from the unquiet darkness within the house, and to flee out alone into the dim white peace of the heath and the woods.

She yielded to the longing; she drew the door gently to behind her, and went forth with swift steps across the rough, frozen ground and in amongst the trees. She did not wait to consider whether Paul would be angry with her for her flight; the desire to be alone with herself, to be free from the influence of any spirit but her own, was so strongly upon her that it overpowered all other feelings; and she went on quickly, almost running, the keen air and her own impulse toward flight alike exciting her to rapid motion.

But after a while the gaunt trees, holding their bare white arms above her head, calmed her mood; their stillness was in reproachful contrast with her unrest, and worked upon her bit by bit, till, hardly knowing why, she slackened her pace, and at last stood still.

It was perfectly silent, with the clear silence of frost, upon which any slightest sound breaks with keen precision; the sky was growing darker, the stars brighter; through the network of bare white twigs and boughs Rhoda could see the shining space undimmed by any cloud: and it seemed to her that the beauty of holiness was vivid in the glistening sky, and covered the quiet trees, and possessed the calm air. Her old longing after a higher, finer life awoke once more within her; the strength of it annulled for the time all the subtler instincts and tendencies of her many-sided nature: once

more her girlish ideal of saintliness seemed a reality, the attainment of it possible. And the ideal music that she had dreamed of before she had known Anthony Dexter, that held heights and no depths, that had remained faint and undefined in her imagination, became possible too: it seemed to her that the stars sang it above her, that the trees held it prisoned, that the keen air was full of it. If she could but hear the notes! She felt sure that the music was about her as she stood. If only her ears could be opened to the sound of it the memory of the sound would stay with her, she knew, all through her life, and become a shield, invisible but strong, between her and evil.

She waited: the silence was so beautiful in the growing darkness; the darkness, with the stars looking down upon it, was so beautiful in the silence: the music perhaps would breathe through the stillness at last.

Then, far off, she heard the sound of footsteps; it grew more distinct, and she knew the tread, and that Paul was coming toward her. For the first time in her life she shrank from the influence of his presence; the strength she had trusted in so far had some hardness in it to-night; the look in his eyes when he had commanded her obedience was still present to her mind, and impelled her anew to flight. For a moment she hesitated, then moved on quickly, in and out amongst the trees, her blood tingling, her spirits rising with the rapid motion through the frosty air. But all at once her flight came to an end; a root that twisted across the path, and rose here and there above the ground, caught her foot and caused her to trip; she stumbled forward, and her head came with strong force against the trunk of a tree. The blow stunned her, and she fell helpless, the sky and the woods and the sense of pursuit fading in one moment into a blank darkness.

Paul Garnet came striding through the woods. He did not look up at the splendid sky, or pause to observe the naked patient trees, or take any delight in the pure cold air. He was half angry with Rhoda, half pleased that she had in a certain sense defied him; placid, implicit obedience he did not desire; he liked to compel his wife's submission, not caring for victory without a sense of contest. He began to think as he went along that she could not have taken the path to Fanelands; he was nearly through the wood, and he had not overtaken her. Then, all at once, his quick eyes saw something dark lying on the white ground at the side of the path some yards ahead of him. He started forward, and reaching it, kneeled down in the frozen snow.

"Rhoda!" he said, "Rhoda!"

There was no answer. He could not see distinctly the pale face with the closed eyes and parted lips; the one hand lying outside the folds of the cloak was icy cold. For an instant Paul thought that she was dead, and the thought gripped his heart with a passion of terror, making him sway and tremble as he knelt; then he raised her in his arms, and holding her tightly to him, set out toward Fanelands Hall.

He walked quickly; he was strong and big, and the fear and pain within him made Rhoda's weight seem as nothing in his arms. She could not be dead; it could not be that she had passed away from him; yet the dread was constant in his heart, and his face was white and drawn with fear. On the borders of the wood, in the space between the gardens and trees, Rhoda's head stirred slightly, and a little moan came from her lips. Paul stopped and bent his head.

"Rhoda!" he said again, "can you hear me, Rhoda?"

"Where am I?" she said.

"You are with me, quite safe. We are almost home."

She did not speak again, and he hurried on. He reached the side-door and, passing along the passage into the hall, laid her on the sofa by the fire. Then he saw that her forehead was bruised, and that above the left temple there was a little cut from which the blood oozed slowly; her eyes were open now.

"What is it?" said Paul; "what happened?"

"I fell—against a tree; I remember now. It must have stunned me."

Paul rang the bell, and sent the servants hunting all over the house for different remedies; then he came back to the sofa and knelt down beside it. His eyes had a hungry look; his face was still pale and drawn.

"I thought you were dead," he said in a whisper.

Rhoda smiled.

"Would you have been sorry?"

He bent over her and covered her with fierce kisses.

"I should have cursed God and died," he said, "if He had dared to take you from me."

"Ah, Paul!" she said; "take care."

"Of what?"

"Of His anger—if He should mark your words——"

Paul laughed.

"You are still here. I care for nothing else."

All the evening he kept her lying on the sofa. He brought her her supper with his own hands, and watched her while she ate it, standing with his back to the huge fire, his dark eyes fixed upon her face.

"Don't you think," said Rhoda, half laughing, and passing her hand across her brow, "that you had better go away for a time—till my face comes back to the face you know?"

"How do I know I should find you here when I came back?"

"Why not?" she asked.

"I left you for two minutes this evening," he said, "and when I came back, you were gone. I called to you, and there was nothing but darkness."

Rhoda said nothing.

"Why did you go?" Paul asked.

"I hardly know; and yet—yes, I will tell you. Your eyes were almost cruel when you spoke to me, and while I waited alone, the darkness seemed filled with the power of your will. I wanted to get away from it, to be by myself; and outside it seemed all peace and freedom."

Paul came close to her, and once more kneeled down by her side.

"I told you," he said, "that when we were always together, you and I, we should come to have but one mind, one will."

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "but must that mind, that will, be always yours?"

Paul laughed.

"Nay," he said; "by and by, as our life goes on and we grow in our thoughts closer and closer together, we shall not care or know whose the will may be."

"My will has no power to influence yours," she said.

He answered her with a sort of a cry.

"You do not know."

"Have I any power?"

She smiled with something both of pleasure and sadness in her eyes.

"When I saw you lying there to-night——"

Paul paused and drew in his breath.

"Surely I love you, Paul," she said.

There was a question in her voice.

"If you did not," he answered, "I almost think I could kill you. And yet," he went on after a pause, "how can I tell whether you love me; or whether, if

you did not love me, I should have strength to cut you off altogether and forever from my life? Your face is a mystery and a charm. Can I be sure that I read it aright, or that if it deceives me I could withstand its charm? No, I cannot; I can be sure of nothing with which you have to do."

"Yet you were hard with me this evening. Your will was more to you than my desire."

"Can I dare to let you go free?" Paul said, "to let you escape from my will? No, I must keep and hold you for my own. If once you should go forth, I doubt—I cannot tell if you would ever return, submit to me again."

"I am not likely to go forth."

Paul's eyes grew stern again, and his voice took on its ordinary tone as he answered her:

"You shall not."

CHAPTER VI.

Yet to be loved makes not to love again.

TENNYSON.

In the new year Paul and Rhoda were much together. There were not many neighbours near Fanelands Hall; none who lived quite close; and the husband and wife saw very little of any world but their own. In February, when the days began to lengthen, they spent much of their time in rambles through the fine country that stretched for miles on every side of their home. Beyond the wide heath the character of the country changed: the desolate wildness of it disappeared, and it became soft and rich, with shady lanes winding between the sheltered fields and up and down the gentle slopes. Rhoda had never before been more than a mile or two

away from Heather Den, and the thick hedges, the well-to-do villages, the snug homesteads, were all new to her.

"If I had been born and had grown up here," she said one day to Paul as they were passing through a little village, clustered about an ivy-covered church, "instead of at Heather Den, I should have been quite different from what I am now."

"How?"

"I should have been better, and—sleepier."

"I prefer the mould of Heather Den," said Paul.

"I know you do; but you are wrong."

"How?" he asked again.

"If I had been better than I am, why, of course"—she paused, and ended with a laugh—"of course I should have been better than I am."

"I doubt it," he said.

"Have you no hope of me?"

"All hope; but the bad and the good is in you, not in where you chance to live."

"But the things that happen to one," she said, "that is what makes the difference; and if I had lived here——"

She hesitated and stopped speaking.

"The things that happen to one depend quite as much upon one's nature, as one's nature depends upon the things that happen to one."

"Do you think so, really?"

"I know it."

Rhoda thought for a minute.

"Perhaps it is true," she said.

There was a short space of silence.

"Why do you never try to play the organ now?" asked Paul abruptly.

"I dare not!"

The words were said involuntarily, almost before Rhoda knew that she had spoken.

"You need not be afraid." Paul laughed a curious laugh, and turned his eyes upon her. "You mean, of course, that you fear you would never attain perfection?"

She hesitated.

"No. I mean," she answered, "that music does not belong to my life; and it is not wise to bring into one's life things that have nothing to do with it."

"But music," he said, "is a great part of your life."

"Of my nature," she answered, "it is a part; of my life, no."

"Why thwart your nature by putting it in opposition to your life?"

"You said just now that one's nature is responsible for the things that happen to one. I almost think it is so. Then has one any choice but to hold one's nature fast, and see that it works no harm upon one's life?"

"Yet there was a time," Paul said, still looking into her face, "in which through music you saw what you thought was heaven."

"Did I tell you that?" she said quickly.

"No; but I knew."

"How could you know?"

"You never spoke to me about your music," Paul said; "you never let me come into the room in which, in a sense, you lived with it alone; but I knew how large a part of you it was."

"You never said—spoke of it," Rhoda breathed.

"No. Why should I? I thought I would wait until you were my wife."

She was silent, thinking of a time when it had seemed as if she might never be his wife. He almost seemed to read her thoughts.

"Your lodger," he said presently, "showed you a strange music that was as new to your imagination as to your ears."

She glanced at him with startled eyes, but he kept his face turned away from her, looking straight ahead along the road.

"It stirred in you feelings that you did not understand," Paul went on; "it revealed to you parts of yourself that you had not known or suspected."

"It is true," Rhoda said, but in so low a voice that he could not catch her words.

He walked on for a few paces, then he turned to her.

"Did you think I did not know?" he asked suddenly.

"Know what?" she said in the same low voice; but Paul, looking at her, saw the movement of her lips and answered her words.

"That the man, with his strange music, had gained a sort of influence over you; that the things he played affected you in a way that was new to you; that in the beginning you thought all the power lay in the music; and that afterward you began to think some of it was due to the man? Did you think I didn't know?"

There was a quiver in Paul's voice. He stopped short and faced his wife; and she, too, stopped; and they stood and looked at one another.

"I knew," said Rhoda at last, "that you knew, must see, that day in the hall at Fanelands, that the music—some of the music—told upon me in a way that made me forget the things about me. It was new to me and it stirred me strangely; and being new, and I unused to— Now it would be different; by and by, if I heard it often, or if I had known it all my life——"

A great scorn sprang up in Paul's eyes.

"Do you think I was afraid?" he said—"am afraid now? I am not afraid." He waited a moment.

"Which was the stronger," he asked, "the musician with his music, or I?"

"You."

"If I had left you to him then," Paul went on, "if I had let you go, you would have come to think you loved him."

She looked at him with a look he could not read; she did not speak.

"Now," he said, "you must, you shall love *me*."

"I know."

"You belong to me."

"Yes."

He stood with his eyes upon her face.

"Why don't you speak to me?" he said suddenly.

"I have spoken."

Rhoda's voice sounded monotonous and cold.

"Why don't you say you love me?" he asked; "or that you don't," he added, with a bitter laugh, "if that be so?"

She answered him very gently.

"I thought you knew."

The harsh voice in which he had spoken grew suddenly soft and pleading; he grasped her hands and held them tightly.

"Say it," he said. "Tell me, if it be so, that you love me."

"Surely I love you," she answered. "As far back as I remember, you have been the centre of my life; and it must—I know it will be so always."

"Yes," he said, "I am sure, I know it will be so."

Then he dropped her hands and walked on; and they went down the road, side by side, but in silence.

CHAPTER VII.

I would look
Liker my nature's truth ; and both are frail.

R. BROWNING.

THAT evening after supper Rhoda asked Paul to have the organ made fit to play upon, after its months of silence. From time to time during her girlhood she had pleased herself by spelling out upon its keys the airs she knew ; but she had been very seldom at Fanelands Hall before her marriage, and she understood little about the instrument or the way to play it. Paul was able to help her ; his knowledge of music was greater than Rhoda's, in the same proportion that his musical sense and feeling were less ; and he set himself now to teach her all he knew.

Evening after evening she worked on under his guidance. At first the lessons held a sort of nightmare pain for her ; she shrank from the sound of the notes, and touched the keys with trembling hands ; by and by, as she became aware of the difficulties in her way and had to grapple with them, the drudgery of her task made it in a sense easier ; the music was hidden from her as she learned to make it ; later on, when she began to gain some command over the instrument, and to make it obey her will, some of the troubled feeling of the first few days came back to her ; but with the trouble was mingled a consciousness of power and a delight in the sounds she was able to bring forth ; and soon delight gained the victory, and the organ-playing became a keen pleasure.

But before this time had fully arrived, Paul said to her one day :

"You have learned all I can teach you. Now you must go on alone, so far as learning goes."

"You have taught me a great deal," she answered. "I should have learned nothing but for you."

"You must go on alone," Paul repeated, "but only as far as concerns the learning. You must no longer keep your music apart—shut away from me ; the whole of you must be mine."

"It shall be so," she said ; but even while she spoke, she knew that the promise was one she could not keep.

Very often after this, Paul made her play to him ; but while she was conscious of his presence she played mechanically ; and if the music became a reality to her, it carried her into a region of thought and fancy in which Paul had no place, of which he had no knowledge, which was closed to him, not by her will, but by his own nature.

The winter passed into spring, and the spring went by, and the year reached its longest days. Rhoda had kept her promise to old Micah. About once a week, during the long evenings, she took her way to the clearing in the woods, and again led the songs that she had taught old Wichelow's labourers in her girlhood. Sometimes Paul followed her there and watched her while she sang. He never showed himself ; he stood back amongst the sheltering trees, and looked at her from behind the screen of leaves, as Anthony Dexter had looked a year ago. Yet he never saw her as Anthony had seen her. The self-forgetfulness, the exaltation that had come of her belief that she was chosen by the Lord to be His servant, the confidence in her own mission to teach the people about her, the sense that she had power to rise herself, had passed away with the past year ; the simplicity of her girlhood was gone ; her nature had been stirred, and could no longer ignore its own complexity. And the people felt the doubt in her, knowing her to be changed, though

they did not define, or seek to define, wherein the change might lie ; it seemed to them only natural that marriage should alter her, and they sought no other explanation. Yet, as the summer went on, and Rhoda lived much of her life out of doors in the fields and the woods, and on the heath, as something of the character of her old life repeated itself in the way she passed her days, something of the spirit of that life seemed to touch her too ; and the monotony of the uneventful weeks brought her a certain semblance of her former self.

The summer had reached and passed its prime ; August had come ; the days were shorter, but the heat of the sun was fierce, and autumn still seemed far off. Paul Garnet had gone away for a few days, and Rhoda was left alone at Fanelands Hall. She spent a good deal of her time at Heather Den ; her grandfather had become much feebler lately, and begged her each time she left him to come back again soon and break his solitude ; and the pure fresh air of the heath was inspiriting after the heavier atmosphere of the low land about the Hall. In the evenings she bribed Rufus Stockbridge with sixpences and sweetmeats to blow the organ for her ; and playing on and on in the twilight or after the darkness was fully come, the time passed swiftly by, and she had no thought of loneliness.

The organ had lost in a great measure the impalpable mystery which had enwrapped it when she first came to live at Fanelands. The silence which had stricken it then was broken now, and by her own will and hands ; the seal that Anthony Dexter's personality had impressed upon it was partly destroyed : the prosaic touch of her own learning fingers had swept away the charm that had been worked by his. Yet the charm was not wholly gone, nor the sense that the organ waited till he should come and rouse its full power again ; and some-

times when she had ceased to play, and sat facing the great mass that rose up dumb before her, Rhoda found herself wondering involuntarily when that time would be. With her full consciousness she very rarely thought of Anthony Dexter ; when she did, it was to tell herself that she was glad he had passed so entirely out of her life ; that the emotions he had awakened in her were unrealities that never could be conjured up again ; and that it would not have been possible to love him as she loved Paul. She chose very carefully the music that she played, avoiding all that could stir that part of her being which Anthony's playing had revealed ; and by and by she thought, or said in her thoughts, that music had no longer any power to excite or very much to move her ; and hiding from herself, she thought she was at peace.

It was at the close of a sultry day that Paul came back to Fanelands.

Rhoda went a mile or so toward Breybridge to meet him. The evening had brought a little coolness, and she was glad to get up on to the higher ground, and to catch the slight breeze that was stirring on the heath.

Far off she saw him coming, a black speck on the verge of the horizon, just as she had seen him many and many a time when he had been her lover. He walked rapidly ; he was soon near enough for her to know that it was surely he ; she recognized his strong figure and the peculiar stride that individualized his walk.

He did not nod or smile to her as he drew near ; he came on, almost as though he did not see that she was there, till he was within a few yards of her. Then he stopped and looked into her face and smiled ; a smile that changed his dark face utterly, and gave it for a moment a look of perfect tenderness and love.

"So you are there?" he said.

"You did not expect I would come to meet you?"

"I expected nothing. How could I be sure that I should find you again at all?"

"Where should I have gone?" she asked.

"That is not for me to consider; only I could not know that, if I left you even for a day, I should be sure of finding you again."

"I saw you a long way off," she said.

"Yes, and I saw—what I thought was you."

"You seemed as if you did not see me at all."

"I could not be sure, till I was quite close, that it was really you. Do you think I was going to waste my gestures on a mocking phantom that might have taken your form?"

"And it is only I," she said, "after all; it is altogether I. Your goblin myth has ended in this prose."

She touched her breast with her hand as she spoke. She stood looking at him with laughter in her eyes, her face shaded by the broad frill of her cotton bonnet.

"The prose will do," said Paul.

Then at last he came forward and kissed her; and they walked back to Fanelands Hall together.

CHAPTER VIII.

Our present is and is not,
Our future's a sealed seed plot,
And what betwixt them are we?

D. G. ROSSERTI.

"I HAVE to go away again for a few days this week," said Paul in the evening after supper, "on Wednesday."

"Not to the same place?"

"Yes."

"All that way so soon again?"

"Yes; there was some business I could not finish to-day."

"It is a pity you could not have done without the two journeys."

"I could if I had not come home to-day."

Rhoda looked up at him.

"Why did you come?"

"Don't you know? I had to-day and to-morrow free; I could not get on with my business till Thursday. Don't you know why I came?"

"To see if I were still here?" she asked with a smile.

He answered her gravely:

"Precisely. To-morrow," Paul went on presently, "if the day is fine, I am going to take you over to Wrexholme. It is a beautiful place, and it will be looking its best just now."

"Wrexholme? where is it?"

"It is some way from here, about ten miles—a sort of hamlet on the further side of the Kingswold Hills. We must start early, so as to catch the coach at the Fernlake cross-roads. We will have a long holiday, now I have found my way home, before I leave you again."

"I think it will be fine," Rhoda said; "the moon is clear." She crossed the room to the window, drew the curtains aside, and looked out. "Yes," she said; "it is a fair weather sky."

Paul followed her, and stood looking over her shoulder.

"It is wonderfully still," he said.

"Not stiller than it often is down here in the hollow."

"Yet it seems to me that it is," answered Paul;

"more positively still, with the sort of waiting stillness that comes before a storm."

"But the sky gives no sign of a storm."

"No ; the sky, as you say, is a fair weather sky." Paul turned back into the room. "Perhaps the storm is in me," Rhoda heard him say, "or in you."

She looked round. He was standing before Leonardo's picture.

"Did you speak to me ?" she asked.

"Hardly ; rather to her."

He pointed to the face on the canvas. Rhoda came and stood beside him.

"Am I still like her ?"

"A minute ago, no. Now"—he turned and looked at her—"now, yes."

"Once you were glad of the likeness," Rhoda said ; "but now I think it is no longer so."

He did not answer her ; he turned abruptly from the picture and went back to his seat. He knew that much as he had loved her before she had been his wife, he loved her now with a tenfold strength ; and the knowledge made him fearful : the possibilities of her nature appealed to him in a different way ; for as his love deepened, his ideal grew higher.

The next day opened gently, with a gray, quiet dawn that grew into a morning of perfect loveliness. Rhoda was out in the garden early. There was a light dew on the grass, on the half-wild roses, on all the early autumn flowers that were already beginning to bud and bloom. The air was full of sweet freshness ; the sun shone generously ; only above the trees the whirling, circling rooks struck a melancholy note in the midst of the brilliant beauty.

The morning was still fresh when Rhoda and Paul set out for the cross-roads ; on the hedges thin, gauzy

webs glistened here and there as the sun just touched them ; a slight haze dimmed the horizon, and wrapped the outskirts of the heath in mystery. They crossed a corner of the heath, passing within a few hundred yards of Heather Den, and reached the cross-roads about ten minutes before the coach came in sight. Rhoda sat down on a shaded bank to rest ; she was warm with the walk, and she took off her hat and fanned herself ; Paul sauntered up and down the road. Sitting there in the shadow of the hedge, the silent brightness of the place, Paul's moving figure as he crossed her line of vision every now and again, the strong blue of the sky against the little mound of green that faced her, made a sort of picture in her mind, vague and unnoted then, but which remained clear through many years ; a brilliant picture in a black frame.

The silence did not last very long ; soon the sound of wheels and of horses' feet broke into the stillness, and a minute or two more showed the coach as it rounded the corner of the lane. There were empty seats ; Rhoda and Paul mounted behind the driver, and the coach went swaying and rattling along the undulating road. The rapid motion made a seeming wind ; the sensation of rushing air was a delight to Rhoda after the sultry stillness of the last few days ; and the whole drive, past yellow cornfields, through shady lanes, across gorse-decked commons, was a continual, increasing pleasure. Her spirits rose ; her heart grew light ; there was happiness in her eyes.

It was still early when the coach reached Wrexholme, not more than eleven o'clock. The village was small and quaint ; it stood all huddled up together round the church, disproportionately large for the number of the inhabitants. It was very quiet just now ; the children were in school, and all the men and most of the women

were out harvesting in the fields hard by ; here and there an old woman or man sat at a cottage door, or a child with staggering wide-apart legs gave itself a lesson in walking. Rhoda and Paul strolled about for a little while, and then returned to the inn at which the coach had stopped, to order lunch. The inn stood back from the road ; there was a square of grass before it, on which was a tall post with the sign swinging at the top, The Good Intent ; on the narrow sanded path between the grass and the house were wooden benches set close against the wall, so that drinkers outside could have their liquor handed out to them through the low lattice windows.

Rhoda sat down in the little inn parlour, while Paul went to speak to the landlady in the bar. The parlour smelt of beer and stale tobacco smoke : the walls were decorated with a print of the Prince of Wales over the mantelpiece, one of Lord Beaconsfield over the door, and, opposite the window, a representation of a dying mother with her children kneeling by her side, and an angel poised between the bed-head and the ceiling. In a corner was a rickety little table with one leg shorter than the other, and on it lay a crocheted woollen mat under a glass vase, a man's glove, a pipe, and a newspaper of the day before.

Near the table a door led out at the back of the inn ; it stood open, and showed a strip of garden gay with a profusion of tangled flowers. A little stream bounded it at the further end, and beyond the stream was a copse. At lunch Rhoda faced the door, and looked down the path that divided the mass of brilliant colour, into the cool green shade that lay beyond. After the meal she strolled out into the garden for a few minutes.

It was intensely hot ; the sun beat down upon the gaudy flowers and made their rich hues hard and

glaring ; the green of a copse was like a promise of rest. Rhoda moved on down the path to the little stream : a plank reached from one bank to the other : she crossed it, and stood in the shade of the trees looking back into the brightness she had left. The air was alive with the buzz of insects ; far off there was a sound of whistling that seemed to come from the other side of the little wood. After a while it came nearer, and Rhoda turned her head ; she could see nobody, though the sound became more and more distinct ; and just then she heard Paul's voice calling to her, and she crossed the stream again, and went back along the garden path to join him.

They set out at once for the place they had come to see, an upland plain, a few miles from Wrexholme village. The way lay at first along a straight, dusty road ; but soon they left the road and followed a path that led up a wooded hill. The path was narrow and very steep, and the air was heavy in among the close-growing trees. Paul and Rhoda paused often to rest, and the top of the hill seemed a long way off. But at last the narrow path branched out into a wide grass road ; the ascent was no longer very steep, and there was a freshness in the air. The road ran off for half a mile or so between the trees, then it reached the borders of the wood and led on over the open ground.

It was a wide plain that Rhoda saw stretching on two sides of her, in a gentle upward slope : to the left and behind were the woods ; in front, and far away to the right, great spreading undulating fields, with wide spaces of grass land, led on and on ; and there was no human dwelling in sight, and no human being ; only in a far-off cornfield a loaded waggon made a moving object, tiny, in the distance. Paul still went on, and presently reached a mound that rose in a gentle slope.

"Now," he said, "you can see all that is to be seen."

Behind were the Kingswold hills, beyond which lay the country that Rhoda knew; in front was a rich country of wood and valley that stretched away and away till the sky came down and made a boundary for the eye. The full afternoon light was upon it; here and there a lake or a river flashed back the sunlight that flooded its surface; in the far distance the earth had borrowed the blue tone of the sky.

"It is very beautiful!" Rhoda said.

"You are glad you came?"

"Yes; it was worth the climb."

"To-morrow," said Paul, "at this time, I shall be back in Mercheston. It will be grimy, hideous, close."

"And I," said Rhoda, "I shall be alone at Fanelands with the rooks."

"Rooks are better than smoke."

"I can't judge. I have never been to a town."

"Some day, you shall go to London."

She shook her head.

"I don't feel as if I ever should."

"Do you dislike the rooks?" Paul asked.

"Not altogether; they are melancholy, that is all."

"It is unlucky to kill them."

"Do not kill them—for the luck's sake and their own. You will not be away more than two days?"

"Or three, or four; not one day longer, you may be sure, than I can help."

She looked at him with a half-pitying, half-smiling look.

"Poor Paul!"

"Will you meet me again?" he asked.

"If I know when you will come."

"You will still be there?"

"Where else should I be?"

"Come," he said, "it is time to be going back."

The fierce heat of the day was over when Paul and Rhoda reached the inn again ; the garden was shaded now ; through the open door the scent of the flowers came and filled the little parlour as the husband and wife sat at tea. A little later on Paul went out off to the road in front to smoke a pipe, and to watch for the coach ; Rhoda lingered by the garden door, looking along the path, as she had looked when the noonday glare had added a brilliant glory to the tangled mass of bloom. In the softer light the flowers had a slightly drooping look, as though they thirsted for the dew of the coming night ; the shade of the copse was almost like darkness ; the bubbling flow of the little stream could be faintly heard in the stillness.

Then, as Rhoda stood looking dreamily before her, the murmur of the stream became mingled with the sound of the whistling she had heard amongst the trees earlier in the day. She was sure it was the same whistling ; her quick ear recognised something in the tone of it ; she began to hope that Paul would not call her again before she had time to see who it was that made the sound. There was no sign from Paul ; she waited while the whistling grew louder, and as she heard it more and more distinctly, it seemed to her that she knew, yet did not know, the air that came toward her in the soft floating notes ; a curious feeling was upon her, as though she dreamed, knowing herself to be awake.

Then all at once the whistling ceased, and at the opening of the copse beyond the stream a man stood silent and looked at her. Rhoda did not stir ; she stood gazing down the path ; and Anthony Dexter looked back across the flowers. After a minute he moved forward, crossed the little plank bridge, and came on, without hesitating, but slowly, toward her. Still Rhoda

did not move ; but her eyes never left his face ; and it seemed to her that suddenly the bright, strong light of noonday was shining again in the garden.

Anthony Dexter stopped a few paces away from her, and he spoke the same words that Paul had spoken when he had met her on the heath the evening before.

"So you are there ?" he said.

She did not answer, and he went on speaking.

"I did not know if you were real, or a phantom that mocked me."

Still she did not speak, and he added :

"I have seen you so often ; and it has always been a phantom till now."

"Till now," she repeated.

Her lips said the words very softly ; her silent eyes cried aloud with joy.

"Rhoda !"

It was Paul's voice calling to her from the door of the inn. Her face changed suddenly ; without a word she turned back into the little parlour, crossed it, and went out to the road in front.

Anthony Dexter stood alone in the garden, and felt with his hands toward the place where she had been.

CHAPTER IX.

Out flew the web and floated wide ;
The mirror crack'd from side to side ;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

TENNYSON.

THE next morning Paul went back to Mercheston. Rhoda walked with him as far as the place where she had met him on his return home two days before ; he would not let her go any further.

"This is our meeting-place," he said ; "it shall be our parting-place too. Good-bye."

Rhoda stood and looked after him till he had disappeared in the distance ; he never looked back. When she could no longer see him, she walked slowly toward Heather Den.

Old Wichelow was sitting outside under the fir-tree, basking in the heat of the sun. Rhoda went and stood by him.

"So Paul has gone?" the old man said.

"Yes, he has gone."

Boniface waited a minute.

"Are you glad?" he asked, peering up into her face with his penetrating eyes.

"Oh, no ! oh, no !"

The answer was like a cry of fear or of helplessness. Old Wichelow screwed up his eyes.

"Are you fond of him?" he asked ; "really?"

"Why should I have married him if I had not loved him?" Rhoda said.

"There are many fools in the world ; one of the ways they show their folly is to think themselves in love."

Rhoda turned to the old man.

"Were you ever in love?" she asked.

"With a woman?" Old Wichelow shook his head.

"Did you ever care much for anybody?"

He looked at her curiously.

"I believe I care for you, Rhody, more than any of the others I have had to do with. But even you—I should be a fool if I were to care for you much."

"Why?"

"You are human—more, you are a woman. If I were to trust my happiness to you I should deserve to lose it."

"Oh no——" Rhoda began and stopped. "Perhaps you are right," she said.

"You always had some sense about you," the old man said approvingly. "I have sometimes thought," he added presently, "that I would leave you all I have. It is little, very little, but—— If I were to leave you my money would you care for it—grow to love it, eh, Rhoda?"

The girl shook her head.

"I do not know. I hope not," she answered absently.

"It is the only thing," the old man said, "that it is worth while to care for, that does not deceive you. It is yours for always; it stays with you, always the same, if you take a little care to keep it."

Rhoda stood looking across the heath.

"I think I will go back," she said; "it will be so hot by and by."

"Well, well, and I must go round the farm," said old Wichelow.

He got up and hobbled away without further farewell. Rhoda walked back toward Fanelands. On the border of the woods she met old Micah Yates.

"There'll be the singing to-night, I suppose, ma'am," he said, "as usual?"

Rhoda answered him quickly:

"No, not to-night, Micah; I cannot come to-night. To-morrow—or Friday. Will you tell them all it will be Friday instead?"

"I'll tell them, ma'am. We'll all be there."

Rhoda walked on. She was in a restless mood, created by the conflict of many feelings. The sight of Anthony Dexter had shattered the calm happiness that had grown into her life; she hardly knew what the strange feeling was that had taken its place. She told herself that she was sorry he should have come in her

way, that she had seen him once more ; in reality she knew that it was joy that had risen up triumphant at the sight of his face ; and deep in her heart was a strong, unacknowledged desire to see him yet again.

The weather was still sultry and close ; in the shut-in, low-lying grounds of Fanelands Hall the stagnant air seemed weighted with a languid unrest. Rhoda would not go into the house ; she wandered about the garden, plucking the overblown roses from the straggling bushes, setting herself, in an aimless, desultory way, to what had become her daily task, the care of the long untended plants and flowers. She worked on till dinner time, and afterward, in the afternoon, went back into the garden with a book, thinking she was tired enough to be able to rest. But her thoughts would not follow her eyes along the page ; soon she rose and walked to and fro in the shade of the trees, the cawing rooks calling around her with harsh voices ; and after a while she returned to the house again.

The great hall was cooler than the heated air outside. She sat for a while on the cushioned seat beneath the stained window with her book open upon her knee ; then, as the day began to wane, she sent to the lodge for little Rufus Stockbridge, and seated herself before the organ, feeling that with its voice she might be able to unburden herself of some of the restless emotion that worked within her.

She waited, but the little boy did not come ; and presently the maid she had sent for him returned, and said that he was out gleaning in a field some distance away. Still Rhoda sat before the organ ; she had already opened it, and she let her hands rest on the keys, striking now and again one of the dumb notes. The big outer door was open ; the golden light of early evening lay over the lawn outside, and entered

the doorway, lingering about the further end of the hall.

Rhoda sat with her eyes on the tall pipes that rose up high above her head, and seemed to reproach her with their silence; everywhere was the oppressive sultry hush, broken only by the monotonous, constant cawing of the rooks. It seemed to her, as she sat there in the shaded gray beyond the yellow haze about the door, that she and the organ were growing each into the other, becoming one, and that if she still sat on with her hands upon the voiceless keys, she would soon have no power to move or speak, until the organ, too, was released from its bond of silence.

Then her ear caught faintly the sound of footsteps on the drive; but she did not turn. The footsteps seemed to mount the steps leading up to the door, and still she did not turn. Though her ear heard, her consciousness only half accepted her hearing's message; and she still sat without moving, her hands pressing down the waiting keys.

Then at last the clock struck out six vibrating notes. The sound roused her from her dreaminess, and she turned and saw a man standing in the doorway. She could not see his face because of the stronger light behind him, but she knew at once that it was Anthony Dexter: and in the first moment it seemed neither strange nor startling that he should be standing there.

"May I come in?" he said, and advanced without waiting for an answer.

Rhoda rose to her feet, but she did not come forward.

"I have come," said Anthony, "to pay my bridal call, to offer my congratulations on your marriage. I ought to have rung the bell, I know, but it seemed superfluous when the door was so wide open."

"When did you come?" said Rhoda.

"A few minutes ago."

"From Wrexholme, where we were yesterday?"

"Yes. I found out at the inn that you really had been there. At first I—well, never mind. I did not know that Wrexholme was so near this country."

"You are staying there?"

"I was; for a couple of days. I am going on to Weyminster to play at a concert, and I thought I would take Fanelands on my way."

"It must be out of your way."

"It is—a little; but I wanted to pay my bridal call."

Rhoda was standing by the organ, her arm resting on the lower keyboard. She crushed down the notes as she said:

"My husband is not here."

"Then I can only do half my duty; I can only congratulate *you*."

"It is a pity," Rhoda said, "that you came out of your way for such a small duty."

"Is it a pity?" He looked round the hall, and back at Rhoda's face. "I don't know."

He touched the organ.

"Do you play this?" he said.

"I have been learning." She hesitated. "Paul has taught me."

"Your husband? Ah yes, I remember; he has a knowledge of music. Will you let me hear his pupil?"

"I play badly."

"Let me give you a lesson."

She shook her head.

"Do you go on to Weyminster to-night?" she asked.

"No; to-morrow."

A maid came round the corner of the hall.

"Little Stockbridge is back now, ma'am," she said, "and he would like to see you."

"He can come in," Rhoda said.

The maid stepped back a few paces and made a beckoning sign, and Rufus Stockbridge came forward, panting and hot.

"I have just got back, ma'am," he said, "and mother, she told me as how you'd sent ; and I am very sorry, and I will blow now, ma'am, as soon as you please."

"I don't think——" Rhoda began, and paused : in the pause Anthony Dexter, standing close to the organ, passed his hands over the soundless keys.

She turned to him with a sudden movement ; there was an eager, half-fearful look on her face.

"Will you play ?" she said.

He did not answer ; for a moment his eyes met hers ; then he sat down and began to pull out the stops.

Rhoda moved over to the fireplace. It was bare and desolate now ; but she sat down and looked into its cold emptiness, her back to the organ, as often, in the winter evenings, she had sat and watched the flames, and half expected to hear the dumb notes sound. The stillness seemed to last a long time ; she heard and yet did not hear the cawing of the rooks outside ; she waited with a sort of trembling terror, and yet with passionate longing, for the music to begin. The pipes were filled now ; the organ was alive ; and once more Anthony Dexter bent forward and touched the keys, and made it speak.

CHAPTER X.

O Mother, Mary Mother,
Three days, three nights between Hell and Heaven !

D. G. ROSSETTI.

It was twilight when the music ceased ; all the gold had gone out of the light ; the gray ghost of the dead day walked in the hall and in the lonely garden outside.

Anthony Dexter ceased his playing, and turned and looked round. Rhoda was standing a few yards away from him : her face was dim, and he could not see the quiver of her lips ; but it seemed to him that the light of the faded sunset had passed into her eyes.

" You must go," she said after a minute.

He did not answer. She waited a little while with her shining eyes looking into the shadow in which he stood ; then suddenly she turned away from him ; and before he could touch or speak to her she was gone.

Half an hour passed away, and then, very slowly, and pausing every now and again, Rhoda came down the staircase, and stole, with wary eyes and tread, into the hall. It was empty ; the dim twilight held a vacant loneliness ; she waited a while, standing in the darkness made by the organ's shadow ; then she moved on through the open door out into the quiet garden.

At the back of the house was an avenue of copper beeches : it had once been a carriage-way up to the house, but it had not been used for many years, and the grass had covered the space between the rows of trees. Rhoda took her way to this avenue, and paced up and down beneath the dusky branches. The brown, dark leaves looked weird in the waning light ; there was a sense of disquiet in the still air, a weight of foreboding in the heavy sky. To Rhoda everything looked unreal

and strange ; a glamour lay over the eyes of her mind, a fever of excitement made her blood run hot and fast. She walked from end to end of the avenue, her hands clasped together at the back of her head, her face looking up through the sad-coloured branches to the sullen sky beyond. There was no clear thought in her mind ; emotions, impulses, dormant for many months, were awake and strong once more, and swept away the power to think.

It was quite dark when she came back to the house. She paused in the hall to tell the servants that she wanted nothing more that evening, then went on up to her room. It was not late, but she shut herself in for the night, and locked the door. She did not undress, and she did not strike a light ; she went over to the window and threw it open as wide as it would go ; then, leaning her elbows on the sill outside, she rested her chin upon her hands and looked out in the darkness.

The sky was clouded, and there were no stars ; the air was motionless and sultry ; there was no sound. The girl's face was flushed, and her eyes still shone ; there was a whirling in her brain, and in the silence she could hear the loud, fast beating of her heart. Later on, a little thin breeze stirred the heavy air and made a light rustling in the trees ; and by and by it increased in strength and came in long sweeps through the trembling leaves.

The time went on : the servants had gone to bed now, and the house was in darkness. Rhoda stood still by the window, leaning out, and looking through the blankness that met her outward sight into a strange world, wherein good and evil masqueraded in perplexing guise, and the soul of one took on the form of the other.

It was very early the next morning when she unlocked her door and went down into the garden. In her pocket

was the pencil-case she had found at Heather Den, and which she had taken from the drawer where it had been locked out of sight for nine months. Anthony had said he was to leave Fanelands in the morning ; yet she felt sure he would come again ; and as she wandered about the garden in the freshness of the early day, as she sat in the hall and toyed with the breakfast that had been prepared for her, she had no thought but of his coming. She awaited him with a feeling that was almost dread, but with a certainty of expectation.

It was still early when he came. Rhoda met him on the threshold of the big door. She made no pretence of surprise at seeing him.

"I knew you would come," she said.

He followed her back into the hall.

"How did you know ?"

She did not answer the question. She put her hand into her pocket and drew out the pencil-case.

"This is yours," she said. "I found it at Heather Den. I am glad to be able to give it back to you."

Anthony Dexter took the pencil-case and stood for a little while silent before her.

"You do not ask me to sit down," he said at last.

"I am going up to Heather Den—almost directly."

"I may go with you ?"

"But you are going to Weyminster—to the concert."

"I have altered my plans. I have written to say I cannot play."

"You are not going away to-day ?"

There was a sharp, frightened intonation in Rhoda's voice.

"I don't know."

She turned and walked a few paces down the hall, and stood looking away from him.

"Come out into the garden," he said.

She shook her head.

"I must speak to you," he said, "before I go,"

"What have you to say?"

"Only good-bye."

"That can be said here—and quickly."

"I know, and yet—— It is gloomy here. I would rather say it in the sunshine."

She did not speak, and after a pause he went on :

"Give me only ten minutes. It is not likely that we shall ever meet again."

She stood with her face still turned away from him.

"I suppose not."

"Can't you spare me ten minutes," he said, "out of the whole of your married life?"

She turned and walked past him to the open door, and he followed her out into the sunshine.

An hour later Rhoda Garnet came back into the hall alone. She sat down before the organ, and leaned her head upon the uncovered keys ; and she sat almost in the same position for a long time, moving very slightly now and again.

The day passed heavily ; a great listlessness followed upon the excitement of the morning. Now that Rhoda believed temptation to be over, the thought of it became perilously sweet ; now that she had found strength to send away the man whose music, whose presence even, influenced her so strangely, a half-conscious desire awoke in her to see him again. As the afternoon wore away, the weight of depression grew heavier ; she felt very lonely and miserable when, toward dusk, she strolled out of the quiet house, and went to walk again in the avenue of copper beeches.

It was half an hour later, and when she was about to go back to the empty rooms, that Anthony Dexter

came out of the village inn. He had not kept his promise of the morning ; he had not gone away. He had waited in the inn all the afternoon ; now, in the evening, he went back once more to Fanelands Hall. He found Rhoda in the garden, and he found her worn out and lonely.

That night there was a great storm of rain ; it beat against the side of the house where Rhoda watched. She drew her chair close to the open window, and, sitting down, let the rain drive in upon her face and breast. The storm was welcome to her ; the fierce, dashing rain answered to something in herself that clamoured for release, development, dominion ; her heart leaped with a wild exhilaration that grew and grew as the night went on.

She sat on by the window till the gray of the dawn was lost in the clearer light of the sunrise ; then she rose and began to move about the room, and presently went downstairs and out of the house.

The rain had cleared the heavy air, and made it fresh and sweet ; the day was one of quiet beauty ; a little breeze blew lightly in the woods and the garden, and swept with bolder force across the heath.

Rhoda felt no fatigue after her sleepless watching ; the fever of the night was upon her still, and with it the same sense of expectation that had filled her the morning before. Yet to-day was not as yesterday ; for whereas then the knowledge of Paul's absence had caused her heart to tremble, now the thought that he was far away gave her a delirious sense of freedom ; yesterday she had looked to him as a saviour ; to-day the strange spirit that possessed her showed him as a gaoler to her eyes. She said to herself that she would see Anthony Dexter once more this morning, and then

never again ; but the once more was near, and the never again seemed a very long way off.

In old Wichelow's cornfields the men and women were hard at work ; a good deal of the corn had been carried, but there was a field that must be cleared by the morrow evening before the Sunday's rest, and the workers knew they must labour hard to finish their task. They worked steadily. In the evening Rhoda would come to the clearing in the wood, and break with her singing the hard monotony of their life, and they shortened the time set apart for dinner and tea in order to be free to meet her at the usual hour.

The sun dipped down toward the edge of the heath ; the shadows of the harvesters stretched far across the field ; the breeze that had blown all day died away as the sky grew red with the sunset. Then gradually the colour faded from the sky and earth, and the twilight came softly.

"This 'll be the last load," said one of the men, pausing for a minute to wipe his brow. "To-morrer 'll finish it well."

"It will so," said another.

"We'll be in time for she," said a woman.

"Ay, and she'll wait a bit for us if we're late," said Micah Yates.

In the corner of the field old Wichelow stood looking on. He advanced when he saw the people preparing to leave off work.

"It must all be in by to-morrow evening," he said ; "mind that. I'll have no lazy workers in my hire. I know what a day's work ought to be, and those that take my wages must earn them."

"It'll be done for sure, master," said old Micah.

Boniface Wichelow stood for a minute, measuring

with his keen eyes the space that yet remained to be cleared ; then with a grunt he turned and hobbled away.

When he had gone, the people trooped off in a straggling line toward the woods. It was a little past the usual hour of meeting, they knew, and they hurried along as fast as their tired bodies would allow them to move. With their weary, shuffling feet they followed the path through the wood ; some of the faces took on a faint brightness of expectation as they neared the open space ; the lagging footsteps became brisker. But when at last they had reached the clearing, the first man stopped short.

"She's not come," he said.

There was incredulity on the people's faces as they came out from amongst the trees in the open space ; it changed to blank disappointment, mingled with a dull wonder, when they saw that their leader had spoken the truth. Rhoda was not there.

"She'll come presently," said one.

They waited, leaning on their pitchforks or against the trunks of the trees.

"Maybe she's ill," somebody said at last.

"Nay, she's not weakly, and she'd have sent to tell us."

"Or she's forgot," hazarded another.

"Have you ever knowed her to forget us?" old Micah Yates said, turning with a sort of anger to the last speaker.

"She'll come yet," said a woman.

"Ay, she'll come," Micah repeated.

The twilight grew deeper. It was strange to be in this place, associated in the minds of all who waited with the singing that had arisen thence for so many years, and to meet only silence. The silence awed them

as they stood ; by and by the voices ceased to speak, and they waited in dumb patience.

They waited till the twilight had faded and passed away ; they waited, fearing to go, lest she for whom they looked should come at last ; they waited till the air grew chill and the night was close at hand. But Rhoda did not come.

CHAPTER XI.

Hope led me all the way,
With eyes of promise fair,
And waving golden hair ;
But at the threshold paused and would not stay.
Within, dim-eyed and gray,
In Love's own kingdom lay
Despair

PAUL GARNET walked with long, even strides across the heather. The cool breeze met him as he went, and blew with refreshing softness on his brow ; he carried his hat in his hand. There was a gentle upward slope of the ground ; till he had reached the top he could not see across the wide expanse of heath that stretched away to the wooded descent leading down to Fanelands Hall. He was soon at the brow of the slope, and the bare, flat space lay clear before him ; but he would not let his eyes run on ahead with his heart ; he looked down at the ground ; there was so much that might deceive his sight, and give false confirmation to the waiting hope within him.

He went on steadily, rather slackening than hurrying his pace ; he glanced sometimes to the right or to the left, but never straight ahead ; he knew every yard of the heath, and he could tell exactly where he was without looking about him. He reached and passed the

little hollow, from which, concealed by the heather, he had seen and spoken to Anthony Dexter for the first time. The incident came back to him as he passed the spot. He turned his mind away from it with a feeling of triumph that yet held a touch of jealous disquietude.

He went on. A little space of sand lay yellow amidst the purple of the heather ; further on a gorse-bush broke the sameness of the colouring. Paul knew them both. They were landmarks to his watching eyes. A few yards ahead he would pass a little heap of stones, then another clump of gorse, and then—— He strode on, still looking on the ground, as he had done when he followed the same path six nights ago. He reached the point where on that other evening he had paused ; and he paused again and looked up, straight before him, at last.

The heather stretched away, its solitude unbroken, to where, half a mile ahead, the trees rose up, barring the view ; and between him and them was nothing except the rough, broken ground, and the fading yellow sunlight. Paul stood quite still, looking with fixed eyes into the emptiness that lay before him. A slight flush rose to his cheeks, and his lips pressed each other more closely ; but he showed no other sign of disappointment or of anger. He did not wait long. Soon he moved on again with the same measured step with which he had crossed the heath ; but now he looked forward instead of on the ground, and though his mouth was set firmly, his eyes had a strained, searching look.

He reached the edge of the open ground, and entered the sloping wood that led down to Fanelands. He crossed a corner of the village and entered his own grounds by the lodge-gate. In the drive, about half-way up to the house, little Rufus Stockbridge, on his

hands and knees, was crawling slowly from side to side.

"What the devil are you doing here?" said Paul.

The boy got up hurriedly and made a snatch at a lock of his front hair.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, with a catching of the breath that was caused partly by his own private distress, and partly by fear of the questioner, "I've lost the half-a-crown."

There were traces of tears on his freckled face; his under-lip trembled.

"What half-crown? What do you mean?"

"What the gentleman give me."

The tears broke forth again, and two grimy sets of knuckles were stuffed into the eyes from which they flowed.

"What gentleman? Speak out at once and tell me what you mean."

There was something in Paul Garnet's voice that stopped the boy's tears.

"Him what plays the organ," he said, shrinking away as he spoke; "what was here last year, the first time ever I blowed."

"He has been here again?"

The words were rather an assertion than a question.

"Yes, sir."

"And he played?"

"Yes, sir."

Paul Garnet went on up the drive. He entered the house by the side-door and found his way into the hall. It was empty; the organ stood open. He called: "Rhoda!" There was no answer. He went to the foot of the stairs and called again: "Rhoda!" Still the silence.

As he waited before mounting the stairs, the door

into the servants' wing opened, and Mrs Shand, the housekeeper he had had for many years, came into the hall.

"Where is your mistress?" Paul asked.

"She didn't write, then, sir?"

"Write! N—— Answer my question."

"She went, sir, yesterday."

"Yes; go on."

"I was to say, if you should ask, that she had gone away."

"If I should——" Paul laughed. "Was that all?"

"That was all, sir."

"Ah! it's all right."

Mrs. Shand still stood hesitating, while Paul looked at her sightless eyes. At last his set face quivered, and he spoke.

"What are you waiting for?" he said.

"I thought, sir——" the woman began.

"What have you to do with thinking?" Suddenly Paul's voice strengthened and broke out fierce and loud. "Damn you, don't think!" he cried. "It's perdition to think!"

The woman turned, but before she had reached the door, he called after her.

"Mrs. Garnet was to have joined me at Mercheston," he said in a calm voice. "There has been some mistake, and I have missed her. I shall follow her to London to-morrow."

CHAPTER XII.

The man, my lover, with whom I rode sublime
On Fortune's neck.

TENNYSON.

ANTHONY DEXTER lived in a house facing Hyde Park. It was occupied by a little colony of artists ; a writer, two painters, and Anthony Dexter, who had a room on the first floor, whence his music could not reach and disturb the writer, who lived at the top of the house. Anthony's room had four windows ; two looking across the busy road into the London half-quiet of the Park ; two at the back, facing a large, still graveyard, a silent space in the midst of the stir of life. An organ came from the back wall far out into the room, leaving a deep recess on either side of it. In one recess the window was wide and low, and through it could be seen the branches of the trees that rose above and covered the tombstones ; in the other the window was of a high, narrow shape, and it showed no glimpse of what lay beyond it, being filled with stained glass.

The colours of the glass were of a wonderful richness ; the subject was the awakening of the Sleeping Beauty. In the lower half of the window a gray, mailed knight, amidst a mass of rich green and flowers of brilliant red, bent forward and touched the shoulder and the golden hair of the princess, who slept, leaning her head upon her hand, her blue robe falling in quaint, lead-divided sections to her red-shoed feet. In the upper part the figure of Love stood, a halo round his head, one hand uplifted, the other holding a branch of green, with three roses in a full red bloom ; red, feathered wings stretched out behind him across the flowing blue of the background, and others, furled about his white garment,

added a touch of passion to his purity. Between the knight and the princess, hidden here and there by her hair and his outstretched arm, a scroll ran, bearing the words from the song of Solomon : " Surge, amica mea, speciosa mea, et veni " : across the sky behind the figure the motto showed : " Fortis ut mors dilectio " : and both the upper and lower parts of the window were bordered with a space of vivid green, in which, in glowing letters of red, the triumphant words repeated themselves again and again : " Omnia vincit amor."

The window, the work of an artist little known at the time he had designed and carried it out, had been designed and left to Anthony Dexter by an uncle who had discerned in him a certain artistic sympathy which his own children had failed to inherit. At first Anthony was not much pleased with the bequest ; he cared little for any art but music, and the stained window was a sort of white elephant that he did not know what to do with. But he did not like to part with it ; and when he arranged to take his rooms in St. George's Terrace for a term of years, he had one of the windows altered in such a way that the stained glass could be fitted into it. Since then the beauty, the marvellous colour of the window, had become associated with all that he thought out and did in his own art, until the two became, almost unconsciously and quite indivisibly, blended in his mind ; and in his music he found the vivid colours of the glass, and in the glass found harmonies.

It was before this window that Rhoda stood, gazing at it intently, while Anthony Dexter, moving about the room, collected various papers and note-books together. After a time he came and stood behind her. She turned suddenly.

" What does it mean ? " she said, " the words that

run all round the frame ? They are the same words over and over again, but I cannot read them."

"Love conquers all."

"It is true," she said, with a flashing smile ; "it is the very truth, the only truth a woman needs to know." She looked at Anthony with the smile still lingering. "Play me again," she said, "the music that taught me the truth."

He sat down at the organ and played the air that had been born amidst the solitude and the sighing winds of Heather Den. Rhoda listened, still standing with her eyes upon the rich beauty of the window. Her breath came faster as she listened, but her face no longer wore the look of doubt and fear that had troubled it when first Anthony had touched her with his music ; now there was a smile upon her lips, half exulting, half defiant, and a look of determination in her eyes. When the music ceased, she turned and came a few steps toward the player ; as she did so, her eyes met the view of the Park through the front window, and she stopped to look at it. The afternoon was gray ; it was not raining, but rain-clouds, borne onward by a slow, persistent wind, covered all the sky ; the dusty leaves moved lazily ; the brown, worn grass was spotted with poorly-clad children, gathered in little groups or running hither and thither in their play. The scene had a prosaic sadness about it ; the glory of the summer seemed to have passed away, leaving only dust and weariness to the drooping trees ; there was no beauty of light and shade on the sunless, even-toned tract of grass ; the poetry of childhood found no place amidst the romping, squalid children and the uncomfortable babies in the perambulators.

After a minute's gaze, Rhoda turned to the vivid colours of the window again.

"Beauty and music and love," she said half aloud ; "those shall be the whole of my life. I have—will have—nothing more to do with the cold and gray."

"What is that you say?" Anthony asked, coming close to her.

"Love conquers all!" she said, "and, having conquered, reigns. I give myself to it—and you."

They stood side by side, a reckless self-abandonment in their faces, while in the front part of the room the cold, stern light of the real world outside came in and fell upon the print in which Anthony had first seen her face.

A few hours later they were far away from the stained window, the dusty Park, the heavy air of the streets, carried by a rapid, onward-rushing train, further and further toward the sunlight and the poetry of Italy.

CHAPTER XIII.

At this grief my heart was utterly darkened ; and whatever I beheld was death.—CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTIN.

It was evening. Old Boniface Wichelow sat on the settle in the room, where the last gleams of daylight struggled feebly with the advancing night. He did not like to waste even a ray of light, and he waited to go to bed till the darkness should be fully come.

The outer door was locked and barred as usual ; in the kitchen, Sally, not daring to light a candle till her master should have gone upstairs, sat dozing with her head and arms on the table. Then, all at once, both Sally and old Wichelow were roused, the one from her slumbers, the other from the silent heart-worship of his god, by a knocking at the door. Sally woke up with a start and a little scream, and came running out of the

kitchen ; old Wichelow came with slow, cautious steps into the passage.

"Are you there, master?" Sally called in a loud, piercing whisper.

"Ay."

"Shall I open the door, master?"

"No."

"Shall I fetch a candle, master?"

"No."

"What shall I do, master?"

"Be quiet."

Sally withdrew to the door of the kitchen, and stood on the threshold, her stupid, frightened face looking out into the darkness of the passage. Boniface Wichelow went along to the little grating and called through it, "Who's there?" but he almost knew whose voice would answer.

"It is I, Paul."

The words were said in calm, measured tones ; there was none of the impatience and anger at being kept waiting that the old man had expected. He withdrew the bolts and bar and opened the door, and Paul entered.

"I will get a light," said old Wichelow. "Sally, bring a light. I do not care for light," he went on, following Paul into the room, "not when I am alone ; it hurts my eyes. But now that I have company——"

"I want no light," Paul broke in ; "I have only to speak to you, and I can speak in the darkness."

"No light?" The old man hobbled quickly across the room. "Sally, do not bring a light. Mr. Garnet does not care for light this evening."

When he turned Paul was standing by one of the windows, a tall, dimly-outlined figure against the dull gray of the sky outside. Old Wichelow went back to his settle.

"How's Rhody?" he said. "I haven't seen her since Thursday, and this is Monday ; quite a long time."

"She is away from home," said Paul ; "that is why you have not seen her."

"Away? Rhoda away? Dear me ! I hope there's nothing the matter?"

"What should be the matter?"

"Oh, nothing : only I thought—— But it is so sudden, you see ; and she never told me anything about it."

"She did not tell you that she was to join me at Mercheston, and that we were going on to London together?"

"No, she did not tell me—no, nothing."

"The plans were not quite settled when she was here," said Paul, "and the letter I wrote to her from Mercheston did not reach her."

"Did not reach her? You should inquire into it. The postal arrangements about here are not too good at the best of times. You should certainly inquire into it."

"Damn you !" The words were spoken under Paul's breath ; out loud he said : "Did not reach her in time, I mean."

"For what?"

"To tell her where she was to meet me. I missed her, and she went on to London alone."

"Alone?"

Paul did not notice the question nor the faintly sarcastic tone of the voice that asked it.

"I followed her yesterday," he said.

"And you are back to-day ! You did not stay long. And Rhody—why did she not come with you this evening?"

"I thought I told you ; because she is still away."

"Ah, yes, I remember. She is away, and you came back?"

"Precisely."

"Each of you left alone?"

"She will be away some months," Paul said. "I cannot leave Fanelands for so long. I shall go to London only for a day now and again."

"It will be lonely for Rhody all alone."

"I have many friends in London; she will not be lonely."

"And she has a friend—our lodger of last year; he lives in London, I believe. By the way, he was here last week, while you were away."

"So I heard."

"Ah! Rhody would tell you. He spent most of his time at the Hall, I was told."

"You were told rightly."

"He should have taken charge of Rhody on her way to London—if he went back to London, of course, I mean."

"He did."

Paul's voice, that had been so strong and firm hitherto, said the last words with a slight falter. Old Wichelow did not appear to notice him.

"I thought perhaps he would," the old man said, with a sort of snigger; "I thought as much."

The latent sneer in Boniface Wichelow's tone, the half-laugh with which he ended his speech, made a sudden change in Paul's attitude and voice. In two bounds he was beside the settle.

"Tell me what you mean," he said.

The old man cowered down into his dark corner.

"Nothing, Paul. Paul, I mean nothing," he cried, in a jerky, frightened voice.

Without speaking, Paul left the room, and returned

presently with a lighted candle. He came back to the settle, and held the candle close to the old man's face.

"Now," he said, "tell me what you mean, and tell me at once."

Old Wichelow shrank from his gaze, but he could not withdraw his eyes from the fierce eyes before him.

"I thought——" he began.

There was no sarcasm in his voice now, only a trembling fear.

"Go on."

"That Rhody——"

"Go on."

"Might have left you."

For half a minute there was intense, dead silence in the room; the two faces, the old, white, wrinkled one, and the other, dark, set, with a world of fierce, crushed-back pain in it, were close together, vivid in the light of the candle that flared and flickered between them. Then suddenly Paul rose up and threw the candle away from him, and in the darkness that closed over the space of light where it had burned, gave a sharp cry.

"You have spoken the truth," he said.

He stood there, silent again, motionless, while old Wichelow, crouching on the settle, and hidden by the darkness, let his frightened face relax in strange contortions. Presently Paul came back to the settle; he kneeled down, and seized one of the old man's hands in his, crushing it in the strength of his grasp. Boniface winced and writhed, but made no sound.

"What you have said is the truth," Paul said, with low, suppressed utterance. "She has left me."

"With——"

"With Anthony Dexter." Paul's voice rose in a groaning laugh; then sank immediately to its low, concentrated tone again. "You and I know," he said,

"you and I and the devil, we three. But nobody else. You remember what I said when I came here to-night?"

"Ay!" the old man said softly.

"*That* is the truth, for everybody else; and for you—after to-night."

"But how—if she never comes back?"

"She will come back."

As Paul said the words, the old man shuddered, hardly knowing why.

"You—but you will not forgive her, Paul?"

"No."

"And he?" old Wichelow asked, in the whisper to which his voice had sunk. "Shall you kill him?"

"If I had found him yesterday, I should have killed him."

"You did not find him?"

"No; but sooner or later he must bring her back to London again."

"Till then——"

"I can wait."

Paul was quiet a minute; then, with a sudden movement, he threw the old man's hand away from him and rose to his feet.

"You know now what has happened," he said. "If you ever tell as truth anything other than what I have willed to be the truth, I shall know how to reckon with you."

He crossed the room and went down the passage, and old Wichelow heard the door bang to. He sat for a long time crouched up on the settle without moving; Paul's presence, his words and manner, something in the tone of his voice, had created in the old man a nervous dread, which continued long after Paul had left the house. But gradually he recovered from the

impression which had been made upon him, and at last he got down from his seat and moved slowly across the room.

"Poor Rhody!" he muttered; "a fool, like all the rest—a doting, blind fool!" All at once he began to chuckle. "And Paul?" he said; "he is down at last! Anyhow, she has paid my debt to Paul."

Paul Garnet went out on to the heath. The unheeding stars shone faintly, with a mild, benignant light, between the slow clouds that trailed across the sky; the stretch of heather lay blank and dark before him. He walked on at a slow, even pace, till he was about a mile away from Heather Den; then, when the loneliness around him was complete, he sat down upon the ground. He drew his knees up nearly to his chin; his head bent over them; his hands clasped them round. And so he sat without moving for two long hours.

The night grew thick about him; the breeze brushed him coldly; the dew lay damp upon his unshielded head. He still sat on, his body rigid and motionless as death, his heart wrung with a living agony of passionate despair and pain that, by its very intensity, destroyed at last the capacity to suffer. Worn to exhaustion, Paul's figure bent and swayed; he sank upon his side; and lying in the heather, in the place where Anthony Dexter had seen him first, he fell into a deep and heavy sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

I, if I sin, sin with my mind and will,
And if the price of sinning be my soul,
Then let it perish quickly.

It was drawing on toward sunset. The broad lagoon lay still, offering its quiet breast as a mirror for the fairy colouring that clothes the sky and floats in the atmosphere of Venice in September. Stretches of motionless opal were broken here and there by rippling lines, wherein the magic light took life and moved and danced ; far off the sky, in love with the image of itself, dipped down to reach the sea ; from out the water rose the palaces and towers of the floating town.

On the lagoon the gloomy gondolas, like realities of death in a dream of life, moved over the smooth water ; in one of them sat Rhoda Garnet and Anthony Dexter. Rhoda leaned back on the soft cushions. There was a languorous grace in her attitude ; one hand, hanging over the side of the gondola, touched the water now and again ; the light cloak she wore was unfastened and had slipped from her shoulders, leaving her throat bare. As the sun sank, the sky grew glorious with shaded reds and pinks, violet and palest blue, and the wonderful Venice green, which, finding no grass wherein to lay down its beauty, will yet not quite desert the favoured fairy town, but shows itself at sunset in the sky ; and the water, drinking in the colours glowing and brightening above, painted them afresh with a transparent touch that made their richness a marvel ; till the whole world seemed a magic globe, with Venice and the black gondolas in the midst, glory divided from glory by the life of men and the floating shadows of death.

Rhoda, looking from sky to sea, spoke after a space of silence.

"I never knew," she said, "what beauty was till now."

"Nor I." Anthony's eyes were on her face. "You are much more beautiful than you have ever been."

She smiled.

"Yes ; I know it. I am very glad. It proves to me that I have found myself."

"Give me the credit. You would never have found yourself if it had not been for me."

"I wonder," she said.

"When I first saw you——"

"Oh, yes," she broke in quickly ; "when you first saw me, I thought the world was a wilderness and I myself a pilgrim."

"And now ?"

"Now I know that the world was made for life, and that I was meant to live."

He looked at her a little pensively.

"Yet," he said slowly, "you were very beautiful all that time ; there was a charm——"

Her laugh had a discordant note in it.

"The charm of mystery. Now that you know me for what I am, the charm is gone ; there is nothing more to discover."

"I am not so sure."

"No," she said quickly ; "I shall never change from what I am now. I shall go on"—her voice sank and died away into a whisper that he could not hear—"further and further away from what I was, until I die."

"What is that you say ?" Anthony asked.

"I was prophesying," she said lightly, "but prophecies are futile. It is as foolish to look forward as it is fatal to look back." She paused a moment, and drew

her cloak up about her. "We will go on," she said, "without thought or doubt, to the very end."

The sunset was still gorgeous when the gondola touched the stone edge of the Piazzetta. As Rhoda and Anthony walked down the wide Piazza of St. Mark, the rich front of the great cathedral was shining and brilliant in the evening light. They reached their hotel by narrow streets and little bridges over side canals, and entered it from the back.

When Rhoda went up to her room, the sky was still pink over Santa Maria della Salute and beyond San Georgio, and the beauty of the colouring seemed twofold after the sober light of the shadowed side streets.

At *table d'hôte* she sat next to a stolid prosperous Englishman. After a time he passed her the salt, and began to talk to her.

"Have you been long in Venice?" he asked.

"Only a week."

"A week is not long for Venice."

"No," she answered; "it has passed very quickly."

"There is so much to see," said her neighbour, looking at the *menu*.

"Yes; or one wants to go on seeing the same things over and over again."

"St. Mark's is very fine."

"Very."

"I don't know which is the finest, the outside or the interior."

"I have not been inside."

"Not been inside, and you have been a week in Venice?"

"I never go inside anything," Rhoda said.

"But—don't you think you ought to?"

Her companion looked at her with a grave, half-puzzled face. He knew exactly what he ought to

admire, and was prepared to do it cheerfully ; to refuse deliberately even to look at the beauties which everybody discussed on their return home seemed to him almost morally wrong.

Rhoda looked at him and smiled.

"I do the things that I like," she said ; "there is no *ought* in my life."

Her neighbour's face relaxed ; she was very pleasant to look upon.

"Well, of course, when one is abroad," he said, "one is not quite so strict. The Sundays, for instance. When one is at Rome, you know——"

"But I am at home," the girl broke in, with a backward twist of her head, and a thrill of enjoyment in her voice.

"At home?"

"Yes ; this place and I belong to one another ; the atmosphere of it is my native atmosphere. I lived here once—long ago—when Venice was in her prime ; and in those days I went to Florence, and Leonardo da Vinci painted me." She looked with a curious, half-amused smile into the puzzled face beside her. "Have you never seen my portrait?" she said.

"I—yes ; I begin to see. You really have a look of the faces in his pictures." The man began to suspect a joke, and made an effort to carry it on. "It was clever of him," he said, "to paint your face so long before it existed."

"Oh no," she said quickly ; "any painter can paint a face—whether it exists or not. The cleverness lies in this, that he painted my heart—three centuries before it began to beat."

Her neighbour laughed, still on the track of the joke, but unable to see wherein it lay.

Rhoda turned to Anthony.

"Let us go," she said ; "I have had enough dinner, and the room is so hot."

They went out into the garden of the hotel ; it overlooked the Grand Canal, and there were seats and little tables here and there along the low wall by the water's edge. A gondola, gay with coloured lights, lay in front of the hotel ; it was filled with people playing guitars and mandolins, and singing Venetian and Neapolitan songs.

"This is better than the dining-room," said Anthony.

"Much better." Rhoda leaned her arms upon the wall, and looked down into the water. "How dull and stupid people are !" she said. She gave a little laugh. "All but you and me."

"What are you thinking of ?"

"That man that sat next me to-night. He seemed to think that I should spend these glorious days in the dark insides of things."

"Most people do."

"To come to Venice and miss all the light and life of it ! Give me some money, Anthony. These people are not quite in tune, but they are part of the careless Venice of pleasure and beauty, and they and I are friends."

The gondola drew closer under the wall, and Rhoda threw down some coins to the singers. They looked up with white-teethed Italian smiles, showing faintly in the pale moonlight ; then, with slow, deft strokes, they moved on down the canal.

"I am going to get a light," said Anthony, taking his cigarette case from his pocket.

"Very well."

His footsteps crossed the garden. Rhoda still gazed down into the water ; motionless, the moonlight shining on her white dress, she looked like a carved statue as

she leaned upon the wall. The singing had died away; but gondolas, some black and weird, some gay with Chinese lanterns, still moved silently by; the impalpable charm of Venice, the ghost of her past splendour, was abroad and ruled the scene. The lawless self-abandonment that dominated Rhoda spoke out loud in answer to the subtle influence about her.

"I want—will have only the beautiful part of life," she said in an audible voice.

As she spoke, out of the darkness below a face looked up at her. Close to the wall of the garden a gondola was drifting by; it bore no lights, and the dark dresses of the gondolier and of the solitary figure that leaned back against the cushions had hidden it from her notice; but when the face was raised, the moonlight fell upon it, and showed it to her plainly. It was a woman's face, worn and pale, yet with a singular beauty, partly of feature, partly of expression; a strange face, strangely interesting. The eyes met Rhoda's as she gazed down toward the water; the lips seemed to move and form the word "No," repeated twice, as though in answer to her speech. Then the drifting gondola bore the face away.

CHAPTER XV.

I had great beauty : ask thou not my name ;
No one can be more wise than destiny.

TENNYSON.

A FEW minutes later, Rhoda, still leaning upon the wall, was talking to Anthony and another man, who were seated near her. The latter sometimes sat next Anthony at *table d'hôte* and had once before joined them in the garden.

"It must have been Lady Mary Shadwell," he said, when Rhoda had tried to laugh herself out of the startled uneasiness that had seized upon her, by relating in flippant terms the incident that had caused it. "It could have been nobody else."

"Who is she?" Rhoda asked.

"A rather interesting person."

"She had an interesting face. I should like to know something about her. Can you tell me anything?"

"I can, if you really care to hear it."

"I want above all things to hear it. You have made me curious."

"She is a woman—you don't mind smoke?"

"Oh, no!"

"A woman," Mr. Soames continued, "with a history." He stopped a minute to blow at his cigar, then went on. "She was married when she was quite young to a man more than double her age, with a tremendous fortune; or I should rather say, perhaps, that she married a large fortune, with an elderly man attached to it."

"You mean," Rhoda said, looking down at the passing gondolas, "that she had no love for her husband."

"Yes; the love came later on—for another man."

"Ah!"

The sound was so low that neither of the men heard it. Mr. Soames went on speaking in his leisurely way:

"These things will happen sometimes, as you know; and sometimes people are wise, or crafty, or both, and they blow over without an open scandal. But Lady Mary was neither the one nor the other, and she did about the most foolish thing a woman can do—she ran away."

"I don't know——"

Rhoda turned suddenly and stood upright, facing the story-teller.

"Don't know what?" he asked as she paused.

"Nothing; go on."

She turned round to the water again.

"Well, after a time the inevitable came to pass; the man got tired of her. Old Shadwell took no notice; he didn't go after her, and he didn't get a divorce, which, I suppose, was what she expected. The man could not marry her, of course. I never heard that he very much wanted to; but however that may be, Providence, in the shape of old Shadwell, would have none of it; and after a time he got tired of her and the sort of life they had to live, and—he left her."

"There is not much chivalry in your tale."

Anthony Dexter forced a laugh as he spoke.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"He was an ordinary man."

"But she"—Rhoda moved a little as she spoke, and the moonlight showed her white profile—"she was not an ordinary woman?"

"I don't know; women are more extraordinary than men at all times."

"What became of her afterward?"

"Oh, well, nothing very much out of the way; she was not particularly original. She did what a lot of women do who muddle their earthly concerns, she turned to heaven. She became violently religious—a sort of reaction, I suppose."

"She has a wonderful face," Rhoda said.

"She was very beautiful as a girl; I saw her before she was married."

"She is almost beautiful still. Let us talk of something else."

"By all means. Have you been to Torcello yet?"

"No. Why is she here in Venice?"

"Lady Mary do you mean?"

"Yes."

"It is a fancy: it was here in Venice that the man she ran away with left her. She comes here every autumn ; she has become one of the features of the place ; everyone who knows Venice knows Lady Mary too."

There was a little pause ; then Rhoda turned to Anthony.

"Is it too late to go out in a gondola?" she said.

"I don't know," Anthony began.

"Don't let me keep you," Mr. Soames said, rising.

"Won't you come too?" asked Anthony.

"Thank you, no. I have an engagement a little later on."

When Anthony and Rhoda were left alone, neither of them spoke for a minute or two.

"Would you like to go on the water?" Anthony asked presently.

"No, not now ; it is melancholy to-night, the water. We will go and walk on the Piazza."

The Piazza was crowded with people. In the middle a band was playing ; by the colonnades, walled with gaily-bedecked shops and brilliantly lighted, the clusters of chairs were all occupied by eaters of ices and drinkers of coffee : at the further end, the façade of St. Mark's showed its beauty dimly in the moonlight ; and like a silent guardian, the belfry tower rose near it, tall and dark, above the noise and the crowd, upward to the still clear sky.

"Would you like to sit down?" Anthony asked.

"No, we will walk."

Rhoda moved on to where the crowd was thickest. As she mixed with it, as the life and movement of the scene swept past her, the colour flushed into her cheeks, and her eyes grew bright. People turned and looked

at her. Her brilliant face was alight with a strange beauty, not so much of the flesh as of the spirit ; a spirit neither divine nor lofty, but wild, self-glorious, triumphant, and strong with the indefinable strength with which spirit asserts itself over any mere quality of body.

When Anthony and Rhoda went back to the hotel, Rhoda went straight up to her room, while Anthony wandered out into the garden again to finish his cigar.

On the table was a vase of flowers of a deep pink shade of red. Rhoda took them out of the water and twisted them into a wreath ; she lighted all the candles in the room, and standing before the long glass in the soft, bright light, twined the wreath into her hair ; then waited, looking at the image of herself, a tall, white figure, crowned with the red, delicate flowers, till Anthony came up. She turned when he entered and faced him : there was hardly a touch of doubt in the confident exultation of her voice.

“ Am I beautiful ? ” she said.

His eyes answered her, and she smiled.

“ You can never tire of me.”

Her confident voice took on a tone of more passionate assertion.

“ You will never be able to leave me ; not even your music can ever hold you again with so strong a strength as I. What do I care what other women have been, or done, or suffered ? It is all nothing ; I can hold my own.”

The man in Anthony Dexter told her that what she said was true ; but faintly the artist voice that had been silent so long whispered that by and by the music in him would rise up and claim its right again, the chief place in his life.

CHAPTER XVI.

Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
The downward slope to death.

TENNYSON.

ANOTHER week passed by. Anthony Dexter and Rhoda were still in Venice, and the warm, cloudless weather still lasted day after day. They spent the greater number of their careless hours on the water, visiting Torcello and all the islands within easy distance of Venice. Once they went to the theatre to see an Italian play. Rhoda would not go when an opera was performed.

"I do not want music," she said.

"Why not?" Anthony asked.

"I have done with it. It can do nothing for me now. It cannot rouse what is already roused; and for the rest——"

"For the rest, yes, for its own sake? You used long ago——"

Rhoda broke in upon him.

"I know," she said quickly; "that is what I could not bear. I dare not listen to what I heard in it long ago."

Then, with an abrupt change of manner, she began to talk of some people she had seen at the Lido that morning. Anthony Dexter listened to and answered her, but his face wore a slightly absent look; and she knew, much better and more surely than he did, that the longing after music was awake in him again.

She had spoken the truth when she said that she did not want music; but besides the dread of hearing in it that appeal to the higher part of her nature, stronger and more constant than the strange sound influences

that called into activity her more lawless impulses, she feared, though she would hardly own to herself the fear, that the charm of his art, the only passion which, as she felt instinctively, had power to compel the sure and lasting devotion of Anthony's uncertain artist nature, would break in upon and devastate his love for herself ; and the fear made her shrink from that which might tend to its development. And with the unowned dread upon her, she grew each day more reckless, more extravagantly careless of her own shame ; denying her better self ; seeking to forget that she had ever been other than she was ; the more eager to forget, the more inexorably driven forward into the life which she had chosen, by a doubt, lying deep below the surface of her mood, a doubt so bitter that she fought against the very shadow of its existence, but which existed nevertheless, and gnawed and bit into her consciousness. The doubt was this, that the feeling with which Anthony had inspired her, and which was inseparably connected with his personality, was hardly love for him, but rather an impetuous desire to understand and to set free the long latent, mysterious energies of her own nature. She had been in love, not so much with the man who had stirred these energies, as with a world richer in possibilities, and in sensations, in beauty, than the narrow world of her up-bringing : Anthony Dexter had opened the door from one world to the other, and the mask of the magician had seemed to her curious, wondering eyes as the face of the god of love. The unacknowledged anguish of the thought she would not think made her dread of a failure in Anthony's allegiance all the more terrible ; if she had mistaken both herself and him, the conditions of their present life must inevitably change ; and change would mean for herself only more complete disaster. For Anthony the

few weeks of madness would be but an interlude in that man-life into which the world takes care to look no deeper than the surface ; but for her they meant moral and social destruction. She could never return to what she was before ; she must sink below her sin or rise above her innocence ; and there was no ladder by which she might rise, no platform on which she could stand and look toward heaven ; she felt that, for her, separation from Anthony meant a sinking to the lowest.

So, as the days went by, she grasped each minute eagerly ; she would not acknowledge the half-formed fears that tormented her ; and shutting her eyes, lived on in defiant joyfulness.

It was a sweet, still afternoon. Rhoda had been down to the flower-market, and came back with a profusion of flowers heaped on the seat beside her. The hot glory of the day was lapsing into the gentler beauty of evening ; the full blue of the sky declined to a softer tint : the perfume of the flowers floated around Rhoda, as the gondola moved slowly along in the deep shade of the winding side canals. Presently it shot into the brighter light of the Grand Canal ; and then a few strokes brought it to the steps of the hotel, where the water, restless with the motion and pressure of the many burdens it bore, lapped ceaselessly against the stone.

Rhoda passed through the cool, marble-floored hall, and up the staircase, carrying the flowers in a great straggling bundle in her two hands. She had some difficulty in opening the door of her room.

"Look !" she cried, when at last she had turned the handle and could push the door open with her arms. "See what I have got !"

Anthony was sitting bending over the table, which

was covered with sheets of paper. He turned, almost impatiently, as Rhoda spoke.

"Yes," he said, "they are beautiful; I will look directly."

"What are you doing?" she asked.

She put the flowers down and advanced to the table. The sheets of paper were music paper; some of them were covered with notes.

"You are writing?"

"Yes, something I want to put down. Don't speak to me for a minute."

Rhoda obeyed him literally; she did not speak again. She stood for a minute or two quite still, the brilliant flowers lying forgotten beside her; then, slowly, she retreated to the door. When at last Anthony looked up and turned to speak to her, she was gone. His eyes fell upon the mass of flowers; their rich colours reminded him vaguely of the stained window in his room in London; the subtle connection that had grown up in his mind between sound and colour appealed to him in a way of which he was hardly conscious; after a minute he turned back to the table and went on with his writing.

Rhoda, meanwhile, walked quickly through the narrow streets at the back of the hotel. The gnawing fear which had been gradually growing in her mind, had stirred at last; she would not allow it to have a positive existence; but it had quickened, and she knew, even while she would not admit the knowledge, that it would soon struggle forth and confront her in a definite form. Even as she walked, the fear began to cry aloud and speak in articulate voice, to tell her that the rival, put aside and forgotten for a while, had come forward again, and that Anthony had already begun to own its power.

She walked on, not heeding whither she went, turning

to the right or to the left as the canals barred her onward progress, until at last she found herself on the narrow ledge of pavement which divides the water from the church of San Giorgio degli Schiavoni. She went in, without thinking, through the narrow door that faced her. It was nearly closing time, and in the afternoon light the frescoes on the walls were dim : she stood looking with half-seeing eyes at Carpaccio's realistic allegories, indistinct with the age of centuries and the failing strength of the passing day.

It was wonderfully still : there were only herself, the old sacristan, and one other person in the place. The sacristan moved about noiselessly, hovering around her, eager to give information about the frescoes and the building, if she would allow him a chance to begin ; but there was something in her face that checked his speech. He watched her, but she did not stir, nor did her face change ; and at last he moved away ; it might be that she was one of those people who came again and again to look at the pictures, and knew as much about them as he did.

At last Rhoda turned and went out again. She had only looked at one picture ; the fight with the dragon. She carried away a vague impression of it, but she could never remember afterward when or where the impression had been made.

As she went out, the other person in the church rose from a bench and followed her. It was a woman, and as she came out into the fuller light outside, Rhoda, standing irresolute, not knowing which way to take, recognized her face with a start of quickened consciousness. It was the same strange face she had seen in the moonlight a week before ; and it almost seemed as if Lady Mary Shadwell remembered and knew her too. Rhoda was moved with a curious impulse to go for-

ward and put out her hand. The two women's eyes met ; for an instant it seemed as if they would speak ; then, with a little abrupt movement, Lady Mary turned away, and in another minute she had disappeared round an angle of the street. All the rest of the time she was in Venice Rhoda never saw her again ; but the strange face haunted her, and it seemed to her that she knew and understood the heart that looked forth through the sorrowful eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

'Tis God's voice calls : how could I stay ? Farewell !
R. BROWNING.

WHEN Rhoda got back to the hotel, Anthony had finished writing and was waiting for her.

"Where have you been ?" he asked. "I was beginning to think you had gone away altogether."

She answered him with a laugh, and in the very words she had used to her husband when he had said something of the same kind some weeks before ; but there was a bitterness in her heart now which had had no existence when she had answered Paul.

"Where should I go to ?" she said. "You seemed busy," she went on lightly, "so I thought I would do some sight-seeing. I have seen a church."

"A church ?"

"Yes ; I have been inside something at last."

"Not St. Mark's ?"

"Oh, no. I don't know what it was ; it was a long way off, and it was small and silent and dreary."

"I thought afterward that perhaps you had been—well, offended, affronted, annoyed that I had kept you waiting."

Rhoda laughed again.

"Why should I be? Did you think I was jealous of the music? Oh, no; I was not afraid, either of it or of you."

"You need not be," Anthony said.

But Rhoda knew, though he himself did not, that he had not spoken the truth.

All through the evening she talked and laughed with extravagant gaiety. Later on, when the moon rose, Anthony suggested going on the water, and they drifted about the silvery lagoon for over an hour. There was a mystery of sadness in the still night; the beauty of it was too real to escape melancholy; the spirit of it almost impelled silence; yet Rhoda would not be silent. The restless determination of her mood would allow her heart no pause in which to feel, her brain no interval in which to think; she talked persistently, with an almost aggressive gaiety, in passionate revolt against a dull sense of misery that would not be entirely quelled.

The next day she was much alone. Anthony settled down to his music soon after breakfast, and she would not seek to draw him away from it. She went out by herself and spent the greater part of the morning on the Lido, where she could walk freely without the turns and twists of the narrow, canal-hemmed streets. In the afternoon Anthony went with her to Muranó, and the next day they spent together in an excursion to Chioggia.

All through these days and the days that followed them, Rhoda lived in a sort of nightmare-dream. She would not look forward; she would not think. Her only effort was to stifle thought, to forget the precipice ahead until she should reach its very edge. Yet, with all her efforts, thought would not be annihilated; though she locked the skeleton out of sight, she was

conscious that it was still there; and insensibly a determination formed itself in her mind. It was full grown before she knew that it had begun to exist. It made its presence known to her suddenly one afternoon, when, as on many former afternoons, she and Anthony were on the lagoon at sunset. It was a sunset of equal glory and beauty with the one that had glowed and faded on the day on which she had first seen Lady Mary Shadwell; again the varied tints of green and blue and purple covered the sky and repeated themselves in the water; again the whole scene seemed a vision of enchantment and no part of the tangible world.

"I wonder how much longer this will last?" Anthony said.

"What?"

Rhoda had sunk into a rare silence; she answered now as though she were glad to break it.

"The weather that makes such sunsets as these."

"Oh, it will last," Rhoda said; "it must—till I have left you."

Anthony turned to her quickly.

"What do you mean?"

Her face had grown suddenly pale. The words she had said had been said involuntarily, had spoken themselves out of that inner consciousness, the workings of which she had wilfully ignored: now that they had been formed in language, she knew that through the turmoil of the last few days the current of her being had set immutably toward a sure decision; the decision to part from the man who had been to her the embodiment of freedom and of love. As she sat with Anthony's eyes upon her, it seemed to her that the turmoil had suddenly ceased; there was only a great blankness before her.

"I mean," she said after a moment, "that I am going away from you." She turned her calm eyes upon him. "You must have known that it would come."

"Oh, no—oh, no ! Why should it come ?"

She gave a little bitter laugh.

"You should not have given me Byron to read. 'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,' he says, and——"

"Is it Byron," he asked, "who has put this insane notion into your head ?"

"No," she said, "not Byron."

"What then, or who ?"

"I hardly know. I did not know it was there till five minutes ago."

"Do you know how the words go on?" he said, "Byron's words ?"

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart ;
'Tis woman's whole existence.

What are you going to do ?"

"I do not know. Byron gives no advice."

"I might have known," he said, "that you would never care long."

"Yes, you might have known."

"Why is it ?" he asked.

She waited a minute. "I don't know, except that it is better that the end should be of my making, rather than of yours."

"Why should there be an end ?"

"Why ?" She turned on him, her face alive with a sort of pitiful scorn. "Do you think this kind of thing could last ?"

Anthony Dexter hesitated.

"Oh, don't answer me," Rhoda went on. "You know—we both know—that it could not last. You will

go back to your music ; and I"—she did not finish her sentence.

Anthony's anger, the instinctive knowledge that she spoke the truth, made him cruel. "To your husband?" he asked with a half-smile.

"Ah," she said, "it is surely time we parted."

They had reached the mouth of the canal ; the gondolier piloted them with unerring skill through a little crowd of gondolas to the steps of the hotel.

They went upstairs without further speech ; and throughout the *table d'hôte* dinner neither of them referred to the talk in the gondola. Anthony was irritable, restless, ill at ease ; Rhoda was possessed by a calm which had in it elements of despair, but bore the outward form of peace.

In the evening, when they had come back from their walk in the Piazza, Anthony spoke out of his troubled mind.

"What did you mean this afternoon?" he asked.

Rhoda was sitting in an armchair by the window ; there were lines of weariness on her face ; her hands lay listlessly in her lap.

"Simply what I said," she answered, "that I am going to leave you, now, while there is still a little merit in the going, and before you cast me off."

"So you think me an unmitigated scoundrel?"

She shook her head. "No ; only that it is the natural, inevitable end of madness like ours." She rose, and raising her arms with a despairing gesture above her head, let them drop again heavily to her side. "Oh ! to think," she said, "that I should ever have thought it possible !"

"Thought what possible?"

"To sin easily ; to cast away all the past years and the effort of them ; to taste only the evil and forget the

good ; to float over the surface of life, and refuse the bondage and the pain of it. To think I could ever have thought—dreamed—imagined it could be possible ; and to a woman made like me ! ”

“ What are you made of, pray ? Since I first saw you I have wondered ; I had begun to think I knew.”

“ I don’t know—I don’t know. I only know that it is almost as hard to sink as it is to rise ; that it is almost as hard to kill the little good in one as to stamp out the much evil ; that hell is not in abandonment to the lowest, but in the hopeless, passionate longing after the highest. Oh ! how have I suffered all these weeks ! How I have mangled my soul ! How I have courted the devil and everywhere found God ! You ask me what I am made of. I do not know ; but I know this, that in the last few weeks I have lived through years and years, and I have learned much of myself, of you, of the great, horrible, sinful, suffering world that I must know for now and always. I know, I see, by intuition, by instinct—I don’t know what you would call it ; to me it seems that the force of pure suffering gives the insight of a god to see both good and evil.”

The strong emotion in her face died out as she finished speaking ; she stood quite quiet and still, with a blank inscrutability of aspect that Anthony could not fathom. As he looked at her, he felt that he had not understood her after all ; the mystery which had clothed her when he had seen her first was a mystery still ; he had been mistaken in his reading of her, or he had not read deep enough. The thought that there was still something to find out revived the waning passion that was partly love and partly a fascinated curiosity, and he cried out vehemently :

“ You shall not leave me ; I will not let you go ! ”

She answered him only with a sigh, that was neither

very long nor very deep, but that trembled as if the burden of sadness it carried were greater than it could bear.

"Rhoda!" Anthony came forward and touched her hand. "You cannot leave me, if I will not let you go!"

"I can."

She answered without moving, her face half turned away from him. He waited a minute; there was something in the passive determination of her mood that he could neither understand nor grapple with.

"What are you going to do?" he said at last. "Where are you going to? What does it all mean?"

She moved away from him and sat down in the arm-chair again.

"It means," she said, turning her face to him and looking at him while she spoke, "that my eyes have been opened. For many days I would not look at what they saw; but to-night, at last, I have seen plainly. It came quite suddenly, when I first spoke to you on the water; the words were said before I knew I was going to say them or what they meant. Afterward there was no more hiding, and I am humbled into the very dust—mud—filthiness—of misery."

"You are behaving absurdly," said Anthony. "You are hysterical—nervous—something that you will not be to-morrow morning. Let us put this subject away from us; by the morning you will look back with laughter at yourself of to-night."

She shook her head. "By the morning you will know that I mean all I say."

"But where can you go to?" he asked half angrily.

"Back to London."

"And then?"

"And then? I can tell you nothing. I do not know."

"What can you do?" he said brutally. "You have no choice except to take up with somebody else instead of me. If there is virtue in change, well, then——" He shrugged his shoulders. "I see nothing," he said, "except to sink lower and lower."

Rhoda's eyes widened, and she caught her breath, but she did not speak.

"Paul Garnet will not take you back," Anthony went on.

Still she did not answer.

"And how are you going to get to London?" he asked, his angry mortification making every word a sneer. "Are you going to beg your way? or"—he hesitated a moment, and then let the words come forth—"or have you arranged with a new travelling companion?"

A slight flush rose on Rhoda's pale face, but she did not answer the sneer.

"I have some money," she said; "I brought it away with me; it is more than enough to take me back to London."

Suddenly Anthony was on his knees by her side.

"Forgive me," he said; "forgive me, Rhoda! I did not mean—did not know what I said. I love you so that I cannot let you go, and the thought of your going makes me mad."

She laid her hand for an instant on his head. "By and by," she said, "you will be very glad that I left you."

Then she rose and passed into the neighbouring room, and Anthony Dexter felt that he must not follow her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Faint and blind as a wasted wind
That beats its life out trying to find
Its lost way over a moor.

ROBERT LORD LYTTON.

PAUL GARNET had settled down in London. The third time that he made the journey up from Fanelands and called at Anthony Dexter's rooms to ask if there were any news of his return, the landlady told him that she did not expect Anthony back for some months. His sister, she said, who went abroad with him, had called the week before to leave a book which was his, and in answer to her inquiries had said that she believed he would not be back before Christmas; and since then, the woman added, he had written to her, desiring her to forward his letters to the *Poste Restante* at Rome. Would the gentleman like to write down the address, or——

Paul Garnet interrupted her. No, he did not want the address; his business could wait. If she could tell him where the lady, Mr. Dexter's sister, was living, he would be obliged to her. But she could not tell him; and he went away to hire a lodging and to begin the task he had set himself, the finding of his wife.

Day after day passed by, and the days ran into weeks, and still the agents he had set to trace her had found no clue to her hiding-place; and still Paul lived on in the belief that she was in London, and that in the end he must find her again. All day long he trod the pavements, dividing the wilderness of streets into sections, and thoroughly exploring one, visiting the different parts of it at different hours, before he moved on to another; and in the evenings he haunted the places

where misery in the guise of pleasure most openly and pitifully flaunts itself, and sought among the many faces for the face that was hidden from him still. Sometimes he was very near to his wife ; it happened more than once that as he passed out of a street she entered it, or that a block of houses divided them the one from the other.

Rhoda Garnet lived a life of extreme privation. After drifting from lodging to lodging, and always from a better to a worse one, she had hired a room in one of the wretched streets that run like a net-work of squalor behind and about the prosperous quarters and thoroughfares of the town ; and she lived there more sparsely, more grudgingly, more careful of every farthing than her grandfather had ever lived. She lived on the little store of money that remained to her after she had paid the expenses of coming back to England. In the end Anthony had prayed her to take from him at least a sum sufficient to pay the journey ; but she would take nothing. Now she hoarded what was left with a desperate dread of coming to her last shilling, counting each day the sovereigns that were left to her, and shrinking from the inexorable necessity of changing them one by one into silver ; for when they were all gone she would have to find some new way of living, and her heart sank trembling at the thought. The London that in her girlhood she had desired so much to see, inspired her, now that she was swallowed up in it, with a sort of terror. The wretchedness amidst which she lived oppressed her with its sordid ugliness ; and the miles and miles of streets, the multitude of people, the noise and rush of the town, were like a nightmare after the idle beauty of Venice and the still, stern peace of the moor. She learned to know vice and misery well ; and became familiar with sin, not clad in the brilliant gar-

ments that had tempted her surface eyes, but hideously naked. She saw it not only in the glare of gas-lamps, with a gloss of splendour smeared upon its wretchedness and a voice of laughter that mocked at mirth, but in the hard gray light of day ; she saw it walk hand in hand with disease ; she saw it clasped in the arms of death ; she saw it with the glamour of freedom swept from its brow, and the weight of servitude upon its crawling head ; and the sight of it, the sight of the vice and the suffering, the despair, and the slow strength of it, created in her a horror of the place she was in, of the terrible unending streets, of the struggling masses of humanity around her, that grew and grew, and must have risen into madness had it not crushed her into an apathy that deadened the power to realize what she endured.

When November came, and the fogs wrapped themselves about the houses, the nightmare of her daily life became still more terrible. She could not look forward at all at this time to what she was to do when all her money should be spent ; amidst the confused pain which made up the greater part of her consciousness she clung steadfastly to only two ideas ; the one how to live so that the sovereigns should dwindle as slowly as possible, the other a half-formed, yet passionate, resolve not to sink in the flood of misery about her.

One day when she was coming in, a girl who lived in the room next to hers spoke to her.

"You don't ever go out of a night?" she said.

"No."

"How do you live? What do you do?"

"Nothing."

"You are starving yourself," the girl said, half curiously, yet with a sort of rough pity.

"No, I have enough."

"Tell that to them as 'll believe it—not to me. It's

a pity ; with a face like yours you 'ld make it pay, and you soon get used to it."

"Ah !" Rhoda said between her teeth, "that is the worst—to get used to it."

"Well, it's easier," the girl said doggedly, "than sewing button-holes, as I used to do ; and the drink helps you if you feel mopy. It's a easy, lively life, take it all round."

"Is it easy ?"

There was a strength of passionate denial in the question.

"Mostly," the girl answered with a touch of defiance, "and more particular if you keeps your looks. And I'll tell you what it is," she added in a lower tone of warning ; "they won't keep you here long if you don't do like the rest. It's not their ticket."

"But if I pay my rent ?"

"What's the rent ?" the girl asked. "It's nothing to them, the rent aint."

She laughed and went on down the stairs ; and the words : "Won't keep you," haunted Rhoda all night. The room she lived in was small, noisy, close ; but it was a refuge and a shelter, a hiding-place ; to be driven forth from it into the crowded, desolate streets ; to have to seek another lodging ; to face again the curious glances and questions that had frightened her before, was a thought of horror. After that night she went out every evening and wandered for hours about the street trying to appear to the people in the house to be of a class to which she did not belong, but which, as she told herself bitterly, was truly hers. Yet, nevertheless, at the end of another week, the landlady told her that she should want her room ; and Rhoda found herself face to face with the dread she had tried so hard to escape from.

It was at this time that hope drifted away from her, that endeavour almost failed, that she leaned toward despair.

CHAPTER XIX.

A game to play, a love to clasp, a hate to wreak.

D. G. ROSSETTI.

It was a damp, gloomy evening ; the yellow fog, thin but persistent, spread itself over London like a double night ; the lights in the streets were blurred ; the pavements were covered with a layer of slimy mud. Paul Garnet ate his dinner in a little cheap restaurant near the Tottenham Court Road. He had not much money to spend, and he lived frugally, passing his restless, monotonous days in an unceasing search that left him but little time to feel the need of rest or food. He had grown thin and worn in the weeks since he had left Fanelands ; his face was haggard ; his features were sharper ; his skin, always pale, had that tinge of darkness which is worse than pallor. But suffering had in no wise subdued him ; his lips were more firmly set, his face sterner than of old ; from his eyes a spirit fierce with pain looked forth with unquenchable determination.

He finished his dinner, and went out of the eating-house into the greasy streets. The dampness hung about him, chilling him as he walked ; the lamp-flames were like dreary ghosts of light ; the newspaper boys, in shrill, demoniacal voices, were calling : " 'Orrible murder of a elderly gentleman ! "

Paul walked on, along the Tottenham Court Road, up Oxford Street to Oxford Circus, and down Regent Street. Then, keeping in the neighborhood of Piccadilly and Regent Street, he walked for hours, looking into the faces of the crowd with an unwearying gaze of

eager hopelessness, going on and on, turning and going over the same ground again, never allowing his attention or his vigilance to relax for an instant. He was hardly conscious of fatigue; he had trained himself now to his daily and nightly watches, and his unflinching purpose made him strong. Night after night had passed in wanderings such as this, and night after night had ended without a single ray of hope, a remotest promise of success. To-night his heart grew hard with its own soreness; his soul cried out in blasphemy; his hurt, angry spirit beat itself against the power—fate, chance, God, that was stronger than his will. Almost the inward turmoil relaxed the continual watching of his outward eyes, the fixed attitude of his mind; yet not quite. Instinctively, of habit, his attention remained on the alert; and in an instant it leapt up into a force of concentrated strength that engaged the fulness of his consciousness.

From a side street, a few yards ahead of him, a woman turned into the main thoroughfare. He knew the pose of her figure; he knew the grace of her walk; he had no single moment of doubt that it was his wife.

For a moment his heart stopped beating, and the misty, dimly lighted street swayed and whirled before his eyes. The strength of self-control, which had held his emotions in check for many weeks, was suddenly relaxed; and the wild force of these emotions surged upward from his heart to his brain in a quick spasm of madness that for one flashing moment set the whole world aflame. Then his will gripped his senses and his passion again, and he was master of himself, knowing what he would do, and calm enough to do it. The thing he had waited for was almost within his grasp; it should not escape him.

He did not quicken his pace; but he followed the

woman, gaining slightly upon her yard by yard. When he was near her, a man passing by, turned, stopped, and spoke to her. Paul could hear her answer in a low, hurried tone: "I am not what you think." She did not pause, and the man, after an instant's hesitation, went on his way. Paul was close behind her. He spoke in a strong whisper.

"Are you not?" he said.

She started, but did not answer, and walked on more rapidly, turning presently into a side street, and hurrying still more when she heard his pursuing footsteps, though she did not once turn her head.

And now began a terrible pursuit; terrible in the frenzied, pitiful agony of the woman who fled; terrible in the fierce, unswerving pitilessness of the man who followed her. The woman went on with hurrying, unfaltering step. She seemed to be familiar with the many turns and windings of the intricate streets. She branched off into narrow alleys; she fled down dark, close-walled passages; she doubled back into the thoroughfare she had left, and tried to screen herself amidst the crowd. And all the time Paul Garnet followed her; and all the time she never looked back, and tried to hope she had escaped his vigilance, yet knew that he pursued her still.

On and on: the woman's face grew whiter and her limbs began to tremble; she was weak from insufficiency of food, and suffering, and loneliness; only the terror in her heart supplied her with a fictitious strength that carried her onward; and the terror grew as her bodily forces failed. Now and again she was jostled by the passers-by; once in a blind, helpless sort of way she struck against a lamppost; she began to sway and stagger as she went, and the people in the streets jeered at her for a drunkard as she struggled on. At last, in

desperation, she left the broad street and the crowd again, and went, with panting breath and feeble, fleeing feet, through the narrower side streets, into a sordid ill-famed street, where few people passed, and sounds of singing or wild laughter broke now and again miserably upon the dingy stillness.

Then at last the woman stayed her flight ; then at last, as she stood, panting before a door and struggled to fit a key into the keyhole, she looked round to see if her pursuer were near.

Paul Garnet had turned the corner of the street ; he came on with long, swift strides ; he was beside her before she could turn the key.

" At last," he said.

The woman, with her face toward the door, made an attempt to enter.

He put his hand upon her shoulder.

" Where you go, I follow."

She stood passive, though all her body trembled.

" I must see your face," he said.

She kept her face still turned away from him, and did not answer.

" We will go into the house," he said after a minute.

She answered in a gasping whisper.

" Oh, no ! "

" Then tell me who you are."

Then she sank down upon the doorstep, and drew her cloak across her face.

" I am a lost woman who is trying to rise."

Paul Garnet looked down at the shrinking figure before him ; his face was trembling, but when he spoke his voice held no emotion.

" I am your husband," he said, " and I have come to take you home."

CHAPTER XX.

For 'tis not in mere death that men die most.—E. B. BROWNING.

It was a wild night. The wind whirled with a rushing moan through the trees about Fanelands Hall, flung itself in gusts against the lone walls of Heather Den, and swept in unchecked freedom across the heath.

At Fanelands there was an unwonted stir ; now, after the many dark, quiet evenings of the past weeks, the hall and the white-walled sitting-room were lighted up again ; fires burned in the lately unused grates ; and dusting and sweeping had been going on all day. Paul Garnet and his wife were coming home again after their long holiday in London, and the half inhabited house must be cleaned and warmed to receive them. About six o'clock everything was ready, and the old house-keeper was on the alert for sounds of her master and mistress' arrival ; before seven, Paul Garnet had written, they would be home.

At Heather Den old Wichelow sat in his usual corner with a little pile of silver in his hand ; there was nearly enough to be changed into a gold piece, and added to the hoard beneath the flooring. His interest in the money made him forget for a time the expected return of his granddaughter, although when he had first heard of her coming, a reality of emotion had stirred his deadened heart. He had missed her more than he owned even to himself ; and the thought of seeing her again created in him a sensation of almost affectionate expectation, which was mingled with a malicious curiosity as to what Paul's attitude toward her and the outside world would be. But while he felt the money in his hand, and looked at the faint shine of the one candle on the dulled surface of the shillings and half-crowns, there

was no room in his heart for thought of any human love or suffering ; and he forgot that Rhoda would pass through the battling wind outside, not far from the walls that sheltered him.

Across the heath Rhoda and Paul Garnet walked side by side. The wind fled by them in great flying sheets ; the heavy clouds made a whirling darkness over the still, dark earth ; the onward stretch of the moor was lost in the blackness of the stormy night. In the tumult it would have been hard to make speech audible ; but neither Paul nor Rhoda made any attempt to speak ; side by side, with faces set to the wind and resolute steps that did not flag or pause, they moved on steadily across the lonely, unsheltered space. In the darkness, the bare ugliness of Heather Den could not be seen ; though, as they passed the nearest point to the house, Rhoda knew, knowing the path so well, even when there was nothing more to guide her than the little ups and downs which her feet had trodden from her earliest days, that it lay a hundred yards away from her, and thought that within its gaunt strong walls her grandfather sat in his corner on the settle ; but she did not turn her head and seek to pierce the darkness of the night ; the thought of the place that had once been her home was a thought instinct with bitterness.

The man and the woman, moving dumbly across the waste, were far from the woods that bordered the heath and broke the force of the wind, making a huge instrument that it touched with a sweeping rush and played on in divers tones ; as they went there was nothing but themselves to oppose its force ; and it uttered but one long whistling note as it struck them in its passage. They were a mile away from Heather Den now, far from the borders of the heath on every side, in the very

midst of the wind-possessed loneliness ; then Paul stopped and spoke :

"Wait here," he said.

His voice sounded clear through the storm, but his words were blurred by the rush of the wind. But Rhoda had paused involuntarily ; feeling that he stopped, she stopped too, yielding him intuitive obedience. He came and stood before her, almost touching her as she waited ; she could not see his face, but she felt that it was very near her own ; his eyes seemed to pierce, not the outward darkness that hid her bodily form, but the veil that divided her spirit from his, and to look into her very soul.

"Can you hear me speak ?" he said.

His back was to the wind ; she could hear him distinctly now ; and she answered :

"Yes."

"What other sound do you hear ?"

"Only the wind."

"It calls loudly."

"Yes."

"Does its strength lie in its voice ?"

She answered almost mechanically : "I do not know."

"Lie down," he said, "in the heather, that the wind may not strike you as it goes."

She obeyed him ; he bent low beside her, and presently he spoke again.

"Can you hear the wind's voice now ?"

"No," she whispered.

"The wind is silent," Paul said. "If there is nothing to bar its course it does not speak. It is only if it meets resistance that it cries aloud ; it is always noiseless when it is alone."

Lying in the rough, bare heather, with a great darkness within and without her, and the mighty wind

moving on voiceless above, with only a dim, far-away murmur where, in the distance, it met the woods, it seemed to Rhoda that death looked at her with the eyes of life, and that life held all the grim mystery of death.

Paul took her by the hand and lifted her up.

"You have seen," he said, "that the force of the wind is a silent force ; when its path is free it makes no sound. So shall it be with the punishment that you shall take and I will give. It will be unseen and silent ; yet it shall not fail to sweep on through all your life."

He waited a minute, but she did not speak ; the feeling in her was too hopeless for fear ; the rush of the wind was like the wings of an irresistible fate that bore away her destiny in its flight.

Presently Paul's voice spoke again out of the moving darkness.

"I have kept the name of your honour pure," he said. "You have prostituted your body and your being, but your name is unspotted as the day you left me."

She clasped her hands ; she made a little inarticulate sound—of gratitude or wonder.

"I did it," he went on, "for my pride's sake, and because of what you once had been to me. It is my necessity to hold you in contempt, knowing you for what you are ; but no other man or woman in the world shall lightly use the name or scorn the presence of the woman who is my wife."

"I am not your wife."

The words broke from her in agony.

"No," he answered, "you are not my wife ; but the world believes you to be my wife, and must go on believing it."

"Why?" she whispered.

"Because I choose to have it so ; because"—his voice

grew harder in the effort to show no trace of the feeling in his heart— “because I have loved you. No stone of slight or scorn shall be cast at you, if I have the power—and I have the power—to hold the hurling hands. I will neither abandon nor forgive you.”

It seemed to Rhoda that the wind shook her as it passed ; she did not know that it was her own sick heart that caused her to sway and tremble.

“ Why did you bring me back ? ” she said with a rush of despair.

“ To punish and protect you.”

“ Rather kill me.”

“ I cannot kill you. The strange thing in you that binds your soul to mine will not let me take away your life ; your adultery holds you back from mine. We must go on, side by side, together, yet forever apart.”

She sank down in the heather, shuddering.

“ Nay,” said Paul, “ there is no other way. And now you must begin to walk in it.”

Then she rose up again, and went in silence by his side through the black roar of the wind.

CHAPTER XXI.

Those that are betray'd
Do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor
Stands in worse case of woe.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN the hall at Fanelands Mrs. Shand awaited her master and mistress' arrival. Everything was as it should be ; the burning wood filled the wide space of the fireplace ; near by, a table stood ready for supper, the old silver goblets catching the life and sparkle of the flames ; in Rhoda's sitting-room the furniture had

been uncovered and well polished, and fire and lamp-light cast a warm glow upon the pure white wall.

The wind drowned all outward sounds, and it was no use to watch at the window while the dark night blinded sight. Mrs. Shand could only stand by the fire and wait. At last came the signal of arrival, Paul Garnet's peremptory knock on the big door. The housekeeper hurried forward to open it, a smile of welcome on her face, and stood courtesying as the husband and wife entered. The smile faded as she caught sight of Paul's stern face; and Rhoda looked strangely white and weary.

"I hope I see you well, sir," she began, in a voice that grew timid at its own sound.

"Oh, quite well, very well indeed." Paul laughed harshly. "We have enjoyed ourselves so much in London."

"And the mistress?" the woman said doubtfully.

"Your mistress is much the better of the change," said Paul. "She wanted a change."

"She doesn't look——" Mrs. Shand began.

"She is tired," Paul said. His tone changed suddenly. "Bring supper," he said sharply, "as soon as it is ready." Then he crossed the hall and mounted the twisting stairs.

"You are tired, ma'am," Mrs. Shand said, turning to Rhoda, compassion in her failing eyes.

"Yes, very tired—and faint. I must wait a little before I can go up."

"Can I get you anything?"

"I don't know—yes, a little water, if you will."

"Come in here, ma'am," said Mrs. Shand. "The sofa's handy."

She opened the sitting-room door and led Rhoda into the pleasant room. Entering, Rhoda's gaze met the

pictured Leonardo face ; the eyes seemed to look at her with a triumph of understanding. She drew back.

"No, not here," she said.

"But you must lie down, ma'am."

The woman spoke with kindly persistence ; and Rhoda, too weak for combat, suffered herself to be guided to the sofa, and lay there while Mrs. Shand went for the water. Presently one of the girls who helped the housekeeper in her task of ordering the house, came in with a tray and glass.

"Mrs. Shand hopes you'll excuse her, ma'am ; she's about the supper."

"Very well. Thank you."

Rhoda took the glass of water and put it on a little table beside her : presently, when she was left alone again, she forgot all about it. The faintness had passed away, but the stupor that is the antidote of excessive emotion, following close behind it and guarding the reason and strength that would otherwise be destroyed, had stolen over her ; and she lay quite still, knowing that she suffered, but feeling only the weight and not the sharpness of pain.

But by and by, after only a few minutes had passed, she was roused into acute consciousness again. The wind moaned and howled about the house, calling with a dreary voice amidst the trees, and complaining at the windows ; but through the cry of the wind came a sound of tramping footsteps that shuffled and scraped on the gravel-path outside the room where Rhoda lay. At first she did not heed the sound, only half hearing it amidst the tumult of the blast and through the wall of her own suppressed consciousness ; but presently, with the footsteps, came a murmur of voices ; and the voices caught her ear and penetrated to her brain. She sat up to listen ; as she raised herself the voices

ceased, and there was a pause in which the wind spoke alone. Then a single voice rose again; Rhoda knew it; it was Micah Yates' voice, and it counted: One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four. She could almost hear the words, and memory gave back to her what the wind snatched from her ears. Then, amidst the wild cry of the wind, a chorus of voices arose, that quavered and shook, and wandered the one from the other for want of a firm leader: and she knew the voices and faults and the weakness of them; and she knew the sad air and the words they sang:

Sorrow and toil, and sin and passion rife,
Satan at hand to vex us in the strife:
No hope of rest through all this struggling life;
But oh! for the rest beyond!

The wind rushed between the verses and broke in upon the singing, as it rose again, muffling the sound; but Rhoda heard with her heart the sounds that did not reach her ears, and the refrain swelled always full and strong above the rushing of the storm. She sat, still in the same strained attitude into which she had first raised herself, her white face drawn with pain, the last notes of the last line lashing her suffering, when the door opened and Paul entered.

"What is this?" he said, standing just within the room, his eyes cold upon his wife.

She turned to him and moved her lips, but she could not speak.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

She shook her head: and then her voice came:

"It is the people—they are singing."

"Your grandfather's people, do you mean?"

She bent her head.

Paul crossed the room to the window, and threw it

open. At first he could distinguish nothing in the darkness ; a confused murmur of whispering voices ceased suddenly as he appeared. Then the light, streaming out from the room behind, showed him a straggling group of dark figures, that bobbed up and down as he looked at them or raised stiff arms to their brows.

“What do you want ?” Paul asked.

There was a pause, with some nudging and whispering amongst the dim group outside ; then Micah Yates stepped forward.

“Beg pardon, master,” he said ; “we’d heard as how she was to be home to night, and so——”

Words came with difficulty to Micah : he stopped now, unable to find enough to express what was in his mind. A woman’s voice finished the sentence for him.

“So it come to us as we’d give her a welcome.”

“And the songs she’d taught us—what could be a better way ?” Micah said, taking his position as spokesman again.

“What indeed ?” Paul looked over his shoulder at his wife. “They have come to welcome you home.” Then turning to the people again : “Come in,” he said.

They hesitated, shrinking one behind the other ; at last, Micah Yates was urged forward ; and the rest followed him. They came in with shambling, awkward gait, blinking their eyes against the light, and pulling shamefacedly at the locks of hair on their foreheads, the women bobbing at almost every step. On all the faces there was a look of honest pleasure that battled with shyness ; and the eyes held expectant welcome. When all the people were in the room, Paul shut the window, and the guttering candles burned steadily again.

Rhoda had risen and stood behind the sofa ; she was perfectly pale.

"They have come to welcome you home," Paul said. She bent her head with a stiff, abrupt motion ; she spoke with a sort of jerk.

"Thank you."

There was a minute's silence ; the men shifted their weight from one foot to the other ; the women cast swift, timid glances about the room ; Micah Yates cleared his throat again and again.

"We've missed you, ma'am," he began, "more'n I can say. I speak for all," he said, looking round at his companions, who answered him by nods of the head and grunts of assent, "and it's a true saying and worthy," he added, with a sudden rush of words that came he knew not whence to his grateful utterance, "and worthy of all acceptance. And the night you didn't come," he proceeded more slowly, "we was all—we was all—I can't put it into words ; but you'll be able to fancy the kind of way we felt bad."

"Yes."

Rhoda almost laughed in her misery ; the rising unshed tears made a pink flush about her eyes.

"We couldn't find heart to sing for many a day," Micah went on ; "and then we made a plan as how we 'ld practise up against your coming back." He paused again, and looked round at his fellows for inspiration. "If it's agreeable," he said suddenly, "we'll sing another hymn."

"By all means."

It was Paul who spoke ; without looking at his wife, who still stood gazing with shrinking, fascinated eyes at the well-known faces before her. There was a little more whispering and nudging ; but it was evident that the "practising up" had been limited ; there was not a large number of songs to choose from ; and after further clearings of the throat Micah began to count

once more : " One, two, three, four ; one, two, three." And then the voices began, in a key that was too high for them, the hymn that they had sung that Sunday night when Anthony Dexter had come to the wood, and had joined, at Rhoda's command, in the singing.

" Oh, come, sinner, come ! 'tis mercy's call :
Here at Jesus' feet.
Oh, come, and repenting, lay thy all
Down at Jesus' feet."

Feeble and quavering, only a few voices sustained that part of the air that Rhoda had been used to sing alone. She listened now with a catching at her heart, half thankful for the faulty intonation and the drawling drag of the voices that, jarring on the nerves of her musical ear, thus broke into, and in so far diminished, the stabbing pain that memory forced upon her. But when the chorus rose ; when the many voices joined confidently in the simple words and music that they all knew :

" Oh lay it down, lay it down,
Lay thy weary burden down ;
Lay it down, lay it down,
Lay it down at Jesus' feet !"

when, forgetting their shyness, the people let their hearts flow out into their singing as they had been used to do in the twilight woods ; then the familiar run of the tune, the simple intention of the singers, the worn, dull, trusting faces, touched something in Rhoda's bound, stricken heart, that set the spring of suffering free, and loosed the torrent of her anguish in a rush of uncontrollable emotion. She covered her face with her hands ; the tears rained down ; sobs shook her as she stood.

The singing faltered, dwindled, stopped ; the singers

looked at one another in puzzled dismay ; their welcome had produced an entirely unexpected effect. The men stood with their mouths half open ; the women shook their heads ; old Micah Yates, with a slow glance at the group around him, said in a voice of awed disappointment :

“ It's a'most too much for she ! ”

They waited a minute or two in awkward embarrassment ; Paul Garnet, meanwhile, a little apart, stood without speaking and watched ; then silently, with shuffling, creaking steps that sought to be noiseless, they moved toward the window. Very soon they were all outside in the eddying wind again ; and the tramping steps went over the gravel and across the grass to the woods.

By and by as they went, the men began to talk and wonder over what had happened : the women drew apart and whispered amongst themselves. It was bad luck, they said, to cry hard when a child was on the way ; it meant sorrow to the babe unborn.

CHAPTER XXII.

With travail of day after day, and with trouble of hour upon hour.—SWINBURNE.

THE months passed heavily. All the chill and darkness of the winter seemed to enter into and possess the life at Fanelands Hall. Paul Garnet, always stern in manner and sparing of speech, showed to outward, casual observation, but little change of habit or demeanour ; he spent much time alone ; and the stormy nights drew him forth to match his restless spirit against their strength ; but it was only he himself who knew his own heart's bitterness, and the havoc that it wrought within him.

To Rhoda the punishment of these slow months was almost greater than she could bear. The thought of the child that would be born to her by and by was a thought of anguish ; sometimes it seemed that she must flee away and hide herself and her sin at any cost ; but in all the world there was no hiding-place ; Paul's sure determination would inevitably find her and bring her back to the silent hopeless endurance of the life he had willed her to lead. Yet, she told herself, she could still bear it, if she could be sure that her husband knew the fulness of her shame ; but she could not be sure ; and the doubt held the chief sting of her suffering. Day after day went by and week after week, and Paul said no word to her of scorn or of reproach ; she seldom saw him except during the constrained, quickly finished meals ; she was rarely alone in his presence ; there came no self-given chance to say to him : " Do you know ? "

Each night when she lay prone before the God whom she dare not petition, she resolved that on the coming morning she would seek her husband and tell him the full measure of the dishonour she had brought him ; and each morning her heart failed with the failing opportunity ; and the gnawing ignorance went on. And then she began to think he certainly could not know ; if he had known he would not have given her the outward position that covered the terrible hardness of his punishment ; he could not know. The growing conviction became unbearable ; goaded by it, she made an attempt to confess the truth.

" Paul," she said one evening after supper, when, as usual, he was about to leave her, " Paul, I must speak to you."

He was halfway across the hall ; he turned at once. " I listen," he said, and stood waiting.

She came a few trembling steps toward him : he raised his hand, as though to bid her pause.

"I can hear you quite well," he said, "from where you stand."

"Oh, but I cannot——" She came forward quickly, quite close to him. "I must tell you ; you do not know. Do you know that——?"

She broke off ; it was very hard to speak with those dark, cold eyes upon her.

"What?" he asked.

"The whole truth ; how far my—your dishonour——"

He interrupted her ; his voice had a sharp, hard ring in it.

"Did I ask you," he said, "what you had done those months you were hidden from me? Did I ask you that night when I found you again?"

She shook her head.

"Or since?"

Again she signed to him without speaking.

"I know all I need to know," he said. "I have told you that I will shield your guilt with the name I gave you in your innocence. That is enough." A terrible cruelty flamed up in his eyes. "You cannot be worse than I think you."

He turned away abruptly, and left her to sink down upon the ground in the bitterness of her humiliation.

After that night, she passed through the dragging weeks with a dull endurance that refused to recognise the keenness of her suffering ; she said to herself that it did not matter, and thought she believed what she said.

Spring had come, and the April air was sweet with blooming flowers when Rhoda's baby was born, a little puling, fretful child, that came into a world that did not want it, two months before its time. There was a

night on which it seemed that Rhoda must pay for the child's life with her own. She did not know her danger; she did not know of anything that was going on around her; in her half-conscious delirium, there was only one thought that rambled and twisted about her disordered brain. It was the same thought that had been locked there, clearly defined, for many months; and the burden of it found unceasing utterance in the words, muttered or shrieked all the night through: "Does he know?" "Oh, if he knew!"

She did not know that she said the words; she did not know that Paul heard them; she did not know that all night long he lay outside her door in an agony of dread.

But life came back to her, and she woke into consciousness again, with a passionate, yearning love stirring within her toward the tiny, delicate child that lay accusing and innocent by her side. The first day that she was able to be downstairs again, Paul came into her sitting-room as she sat near the window looking out at the fresh May beauty of the trees and grass. The child lay in her lap; instinctively she pulled forward the shawl she wore to hide him out of sight.

"Then the child will live?" Paul said.

"They say so."

"You are glad."

His tone was half assertion, half inquiry. She hesitated, her mouth trembling.

"How can I but be glad?" she said with sudden, desperate entreaty. "It is all I have to live for."

"Let me see him," Paul said, coming close to her.

She drew the shawl aside slowly, as though she feared to expose the little sleeping face to the look in the dark eyes above it.

"You are glad," Paul said. "You should not be

glad. The child that you hold so tenderly, will give you only enough joy to make you feel more keenly the pain that he will bring."

Rhoda shrank back in her chair, pressing the child so closely to her that it waked out of its sleep and gave a little wailing cry. When it was hushed into peace, Paul spoke again.

"I pray God Almighty," he said, "to fulfil his promise that he will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children ; I pray that the music which was your ruin, may awake and strengthen in your son ; that as it ruined you, so it may ruin him ; that you may see the ruin ; and that I may be by to watch you feel such pain as you have given me."

He spoke with a calm deliberateness that was far more terrible than any wildness of denunciation. Rhoda looked up at him with wide, horror-darkened eyes. She could not speak, but her bloodless face was a prayer.

He heard the speechless prayer, but would not answer it. He turned away and left her alone, and went out upon the moor to wrestle with the passion of a love that was too strong to cease and too little strong to forgive.

CHAPTER XXIII.

My freshness spent its wavering shower 'i the dust ;
And now my heart is as a broken fount,
Wherein tear drippings stagnate, spilt down ever
From the dank thoughts that shiver
Upon the sighful branches of my mind.

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

OLD Wichelow sat outside his door in the sun. The air was still, and the warmth came down unchecked by any clouds in the deep blue sky. Boniface had just come back from his morning walk round the farm, and

he was tired. He was glad to sit down and rest his stiff limbs; and he was glad to let his mind relax from active vigilance to its normal state, a state of passive contemplation of his growing secret store of wealth.

The strong light dazzled his eyes; but the sunshine was as wine to his old, weak body; and he sat blinking and dreaming in a state of complete enjoyment. Sitting thus with the outward world blurred and dim, he did not see Paul Garnet and Rhoda come out of the woods and cross the road on to the heath; he did not notice them till they were close beside him. Then, at the sound of Paul's voice, he started and looked stupidly about him.

"There is nothing the matter," said Paul. "We have not come to rob you."

"There's nothing to rob," said old Wichelow, shooting out his under lip: "I have neither money—nor wife."

"Nor son's wife," Paul said.

He went close to the old man and put his hand upon his shoulder, looking down into his face.

Old Wichelow's face changed.

"I meant no harm, Paul," he said, "I had no hidden meaning."

"I had," said Paul; "how long it remains hidden depends on you."

He waited for half a minute, his eyes on the wrinkled face before them; then he turned on his heel.

"Rhoda!"

Rhoda had gone to sit down on the bench on the other side of the door; she was tired after her walk, and her face was pale and languid. She rose when Paul called her, and came toward him.

"We have not long to stay," Paul said. "You had better tell your grandfather what we have come for."

"Yes." She went to old Wichelow, still sitting blinking his eyes at the sunlight, and stood before him. "Grandfather, I have come to ask you to be godfather to the child."

"We have both come," said Paul, "to ask you to be godfather to the child."

"To your son?" said old Wichelow.

"Yes," Rhoda answered.

"And heir?"

"The property is not entailed," said Paul.

Old Wichelow rubbed his hands.

"Well," said Paul, "your answer."

"I—I don't know," said the old man. He turned to his granddaughter. "I don't know, Rhody. Wouldn't it be better for some friend—not a relation—it's usual to——"

Paul interrupted him, speaking with slow sarcasm.

"In this case," he said, "we want no outsiders. We prefer to keep everything connected with the eldest son entirely in the family." He paused. "That is our wish, Rhoda?"

She bent her head; her pale cheeks flushed with sudden scarlet.

"I have no money, Rhody," the old man said hesitatingly, "no money I can lay my hands on just now for a present. I should like to give the child a present—but just now—in time for the christening, I'm afraid——"

"He wants no present," Rhoda said.

"I am the other godfather," said Paul; "I will give the presents. You need not be afraid that you will have to pay for the honour."

"I shall be glad, very glad, Rhody," said old Wichelow with sudden cordiality. He rose from his seat and kissed his granddaughter. "When is it to be—the christening?"

"The day after to-morrow—Thursday, at ten o'clock."

"In the church?"

"Yes, in the church."

"I will be there, without fail—without fail, Rhody."

On Thursday morning Rhoda followed Paul into the garden. He stopped in his walk when he heard her footsteps behind him, and waited till she came near.

"Yes?" he said.

"Do you mind," Rhoda said, with clasped hands and downcast eyes, "what I call the child?"

"Yes."

She looked up at him quickly.

"Why? What can the name——"

"There can be no doubt about the name," Paul said.

"An eldest son should not fail to bear his father's name."

She gave a little cry.

"What is it?" said Paul. "What other name can be so suitable?"

"Oh, if you knew!" she gasped.

He looked at her with a strange smile, and his look silenced her. She turned away without further words, and it seemed to her that she understood him at last.

Old Wichelow was early at church. He had put on his best coat; it was thirty years old, and hung in creases upon his shrunken shoulders; but the cloth was still whole and good, and the old man, with his well-cut face, had a certain air of breeding and dignity.

Rhoda carried her child to the church herself; she stood with it during the service, her eyes never moving from the little thin, waxen face; it was with an effort that she gave it out of her own keeping into the parson's arms. He was a young man and held it clumsily, but it did not wake as he took it.

"Name this child," he said.

He looked at Rhoda, but she did not speak ; she made an almost imperceptible movement toward Paul. It was Paul who answered. Old Wichelow started, but Rhoda stood without flinching, when he said :

"Anthony."

PART III.

THE OPEN DOOR.

Hilda. Then do you hear no song in the air, either ?

Ragnar. It must be the wind in the tree-tops.

Hilda. I hear a song—a mighty song !

IBSEN'S MASTER BUILDER.

CHAPTER I.

Mais maintenant les plans, les buts ? Es tu de force,
Ou si d'avoir pleuré t'a détrem pé le cœur ?
L'arbre est tendre s'il faut juger d'après l'écorce,
Et tes aspects ne sont pas ceux d'un grand vainquer.

VERLAINE.

Six years passed away. As time went by, people began to say that Rhoda Garnet was an odd-looking woman; and the saying was true. The distinctive look that had always been hers became accentuated; her individuality marked itself more strongly in her face; and this, in spite of the self-repression that, curbing her nature, could not but express itself in her features. But in her narrow, crushed life, her spirit, though bruised, had not been broken; it is only weak spirits that can be altogether destroyed; the strong ones gather strength—a hard strength it may be, but still strength—from the checked life that is driven back upon itself; and when, with outward circumstances, goes an inward will that bows to discipline, the strength is touched by dignity. So Rhoda, stupefied at first by the irretrievableness and the horror of her sin, and by the load of her punishment, did not finally sink under the weight of past and future: her three-and-twenty years of life had drawn too little upon her vitality to have exhausted the springs of it; and the love of living, which lingers on even after the flavour of life would seem to have gone, was positive in her yet, and struggled into strength as the years went on. She was still beautiful: her face, less subtle than of old, still carried a mystery—the mystery

shadowed in every face, when the soul behind it has begun to develop; differing from the mystery of her girlhood in that, instead of being vague with latent possibilities, it was instinct with the workings of a consciousness that had come into possession of itself.

Her child, the boy whom Paul had named Anthony, was the chief interest, the chief pleasure, the chief fear of her life. He was fragile and delicate, and it seemed to Rhoda that the curse that Paul had called down upon him hung over and shadowed his childish life. She never forgot the curse; she could not forget it; for the music in him showed itself when he was very young, and would not be killed or checked. She would not let him hear any music; the organ had stood silent and unopened ever since his birth; the nasal singing of the village choir and the wheeze of the harmonium that led it, were the only examples of melody that he knew; but his musical temperament showed itself in his sensitiveness to sounds, in the discomfort caused him by the singing in church, in the quickness of ear that detected every shadow of intonation, and caught up at once any air that he heard; and Rhoda noted the signs of his inheritance and knew them for what they were.

The fear in her was, perhaps, the greater from its indefiniteness; she could not see how the music that had, in one sense, been the cause of her own ruin, should darken and wreck the life of her son; rather it seemed to her that without the musical sense life must be incomplete: yet the terror with which Paul's menacing prophecy had filled her had never passed away, though it was only at times that it became acute; it grew into her heart and beat with its beating. She denied herself all sound, all thought of music; she never opened her lips to sing; she would not listen to, or take any notice of the airs that little Anthony made

for himself and sang about the house and in the garden; and this, both for her own punishment, and to discourage in the child, that love of music, the development of which she dreaded with superstitious fear. Yet it was no use; the musical sense lived on, although it was unfed; and Rhoda knew that it was so; she felt it with sympathetic insight, all the while that she tried to persuade herself that the boy was no more of a musician than the little shouting urchins in the village.

The great organ in the hall had had a strange attraction for him, ever since his babyhood. When he could hardly speak, he asked what it was; and from time to time he questioned his mother, unsatisfied with her answers. Once he asked her what organs were used for, and she told a lie and said: "Nothing." Paul standing by smiled grimly: he never took any heed of the child's questions, but left her to answer them.

Paul and Rhoda lived on, as Paul had said they must live, side by side, yet apart. The prosaic, monotonous course of daily life had dimmed to a certain extent the strangeness of their relations toward one another: they passed a certain, though a small, proportion of their time together; they talked, calmly, and with no visible restraint; to the outside world they were a husband and wife who lived in harmony. Yet Paul never forgave, and Rhoda knew that she was not forgiven; and while the curious sympathy that had drawn them one toward the other still continued, each lived in a world apart and in a bitter loneliness. Neither of them spoke of the sin that rose like a wall between them: for many years the silence that was folded about it was as deep, as uninterrupted, as was the thought of it in the minds of both of them: it remained absolute till little Anthony was six years old.

It was his birthday. Rhoda had begun to give him

lessons, but to-day he had a holiday; he spent the morning in running wild in the garden; also in a stolen excursion outside the grounds and a game with the village boys. At dinner he sat silent, fear of betraying the pleasures of the morning struggling with curiosity. At last the curiosity conquered; he paused in the midst of eating his rice pudding, and said:

"Mother, what's a bastard?"

Rhoda started; her eyes sank before the child's gaze.

"Why do you ask?" she said.

"Jemmy Lane's sister's got a little young baby, and Dick Charlton said it was a little bastard."

"Where did you see those boys? You haven't been——"

"Yes, I have," little Anthony said, his face flushing. "I went across the field, and out through the hedge; there's a broken place. You wouldn't ever have known if I hadn't have told you."

Rhoda said nothing.

"If I'm to be punished," the child went on, "I ought to be told what a bastard is too."

"Your mother doesn't use such words," said Paul.

The child turned to him.

"Will you tell me, father?" he said. "What I want to know is if it's"—his voice sank—"very ugly?"

"No," Paul answered; "to look at, you couldn't tell the difference from any other child. A bastard is a child whose father and mother have different names."

"Is that all?" There was both disappointment and relief in Anthony's voice. "I thought," he said, "it might be something dreadful—like the things in fairy books."

"No," Paul said, "that is all."

"You and mother have the same name, haven't you?" Anthony asked presently.

"Yes."

"Then I am not a bastard."

"No, but if your mother had been called Garnet and your father—say Dickson or—something of the kind, you would have been a bastard."

"I am glad," the child said, "that you both have the same name. "It's an ugly word—bastard. I shouldn't like to be one!"

Rhoda rose from the table: her face was hot, her eyes were very bright.

"Am I to be punished?" asked Anthony.

"No; go into the garden again. I will come to you by and by."

The child ran off. Rhoda turned and faced her husband.

"You are a coward," she said.

"How so?"

"You strike when I cannot defend myself."

"You are right," said Paul. "I should not have said what I did."

"Oh, I know I deserve it," she said with a sudden rush of passion; "but, seeing that I am beneath your heel, need you also strike me with your fist?"

"You are right," Paul repeated. "I will never say anything of the kind again."

Then she wrung her hands with a gesture of despair.

"Oh, your silence," she said, "your horrible, killing silence! Am I always to bear the weight of it?"

"You upbraid me when I break it."

She laughed scornfully.

"Such a break! To take my shame and dangle it before my child's eyes, while I look on."

"You are excited," said Paul; "you take an exaggerated view."

"Yes, I am excited," Rhoda said. "Do you know

with what? With these past six leaden years. Oh! you spoke truly. You said that the sweep of the wind across the unbroken heath was not more certain, more noiseless, than your revenge would be; you spoke truly. Tell me," she said, with a quick change of tone, "how did you know so well what I was made of? How did you know that your cruel magnanimity, your horrible generosity, would eat into my heart so surely, and yet leave it life to beat?"

"I read you aright many years ago," he said.

She broke in upon him.

"No," she said, "you did not. You read the worst of me, the very worst, and that only. By your notice of it you helped to call it into life; by telling me I was bad, you helped to make me bad. Don't you know that a woman must be what the man she leans on thinks her? I looked to you for salvation; even when I knew you held me lightly I still looked to you as my strength for good. If you had not told me that in temptation I should fall; if in the thought of you had been the thought that you counted me pure and good, I might—oh, I cannot tell; but even while I turned to you, you pushed me toward my fall."

Paul laughed.

"You think I underrated you? And my only mistake was in this, that I did not place you low enough! I was fool enough to leave you for three days—well, I was a fool; I acknowledge my fault. I see you were not to blame; you could not but take advantage of my folly."

"If you thought that," she said slowly, "you should have let me go for ever: it would have been the kindest."

"I had no thought of kindness. Having made you my wife——"

"I was never your wife," she broke in, "I was never more than your mistress. I could not have been, thinking of me as you did."

He waited a minute.

"Having made you wife," he went on calmly, "having given an outward form to the bond which had always been between you and me, I could not let you go. You belong to me; whatever you do, however you may break the formal compact which the law calls marriage, you cannot destroy the power that binds your nature to mine." His voice took on a deeper tone. "You belong to me: to whatever degree I might despise and hate you, I could not let you go."

Rhoda sighed wearily; it was her only answer. Her body drooped as she stood: all the eager passion which had animated her a few minutes before, had died away and left her cold and hopeless.

"I read you aright years ago," Paul said; "I read, I know you now."

She shook her head.

"There is a part of me you will never know."

She moved past him, out of the hall, along the passage and into the garden.

When she was quite gone, Paul's face, that had been so still and hard, began to tremble. He waited for a while, his body motionless, his face alive with emotion: then, with a sudden movement, he fell upon his knees, and stooping, kissed the place where she had stood.

CHAPTER II.

But O ! I backward cast my ee
On prospects drear ;
And forward, though I canna see,
I guess an' fear.

ROBERT BURNS.

It was a wet day following upon several others. For three days little Anthony had not been out of the house, and he was fretful and restless in consequence. Outside, the thick summer trees were heavy with moisture, and the rain fell with a monotonous, dripping sound from the roof down on to the sodden ground; the rocks cawed mournfully; the afternoon was damp and gloomy as winter.

Rhoda sat with a book upon her knee: she had just finished Rossetti's ballad of "Rose Mary"; and she sat thinking about it, her chin resting on her two hands. The colour and warmth of Rossetti's poetry appealed to her: had she been a poet, she would have written rich verse like his; had she been a painter, her pictures would have held the deep glowing colours of his; being by nature a musician, an undefined sense of sweeping harmonies flowed side by side in her mind with the story of the "Two Fights with the Berly Stone."

The child drew near and pulled her by the sleeve.

"Mother," he said, "mother!"

She turned to him almost impatiently.

"What is it?"

"I've finished everything."

"Everything?"

"Yes, all the books and the games and everything. I don't know what to do."

Rhoda came out of the world of romance into her little boy's world.

"We must invent some new game," she said.

The child shook his head.

"I'm tired of games; I don't want any more."

"Shall I read to you, then? or tell you a story?"

Again Anthony shook his head; his little peevish face showed no diminution of discontent.

"What then?" Rhoda bent forward and kissed him.

"What then, Tony?"

"I don't know," the child said. "I want something, and I don't know what it is."

"Ah!" Rhoda said, "we never know what it is."

She took the child on her knee and stroked his hair: it was brown in colour, like Anthony Dexter's, and wonderfully thick: his little delicate face came out of it like a flower amidst thick foliage.

"We are tired of all this rain, aren't we?" she said. "Patter, patter, patter, it comes down. We don't want to hear it any more, do we?"

"If it would only say a different tune!" the child said. "It comes always in the same place." He put a hand up to his ear. "If it would go up and down all the ladder——"

He stopped and laughed, a little low laugh of pleasure. Rhoda laughed too, pleased that he should forget his weariness.

"What ladder?" she said.

"The ladder of the sounds; if it would climb up to the top, as I do." Anthony sang a scale; "or miss over a step and come back again, and jump about from step to step and make a tune. That would be rain! It might rain all the days, if it liked."

Rhoda still stroked his hair.

"Oh, no!" she said; "you would soon want to see the sunshine, and to run about in the garden again."

The child did not speak, his face was wistful and dreamy.

"You would like to go out into the garden again, wouldn't you, Tony?" Rhoda asked.

Tony did not answer her question.

"Oh, I wish," he said, "I could hear all the tunes out loud!"

"What tunes?"

"All the tunes I hear."

"What tunes do you hear, except what they sing in church."

"All the tunes that fly about in the air. Sometimes I can't catch them; and when I do, I can only sing them naked."

"What do you mean, dear?" Rhoda asked.

"They have clothes on when I hear them, but I can only sing them naked. I want to hear them out loud with their clothes on."

"I don't know what you mean, dear," Rhoda said; but she knew.

"The tunes in church have them," the child went on, "only they're not right, and there's not enough. It's other tunes that go with them. Don't you know what I mean?"

"You mean the harmonies," Rhoda said in a low voice. "But I wouldn't listen to those tunes, Tony, or think about them."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's—it's babyish! Big boys don't listen to them; and you will soon be big."

Tony did not speak for a minute or two; outside, the rain came steadily down with its one unceasing note, and the rooks cawed a monotonous, dreary accompaniment. Presently the child looked up into Rhoda's face.

"Can you sing?" he said.

She shook her head.

"Oh, I wish you could!" he cried petulantly. "I want it, I want to hear something out loud."

Rhoda bent over him.

"Lean your head," she said, "lean it on mother's shoulder, and I will tell you the story about the wolf."

"No, I don't want it," Tony said, "I don't care for the wolf. I'll go and find Ellen. She sings sometimes."

"Does Ellen sing to you?"

"Yes, not proper singing; but I have learned her two right tunes. I like Ellen."

"Not better than me? You will not leave me to go to her?"

The child slipped down off Rhoda's knee and looked at her gravely.

"I like her best when she sings," he said. "If you could sing too, if you could sing like your face looks, I'd like you best always."

He turned to go. Suddenly Rhoda stretched out her hands toward him.

"Stay with me!" she said, "and I will sing to you better than Ellen can sing."

"Can you?"

"Yes."

"You said you couldn't."

"I was afraid; but I will see if I can."

Anthony climbed on to her knee again and nestled down in her arms, leaning his head upon her shoulder.

"Now sing," he said.

Rhoda waited; it was very long since she had sung, even when she was alone, and it seemed to her that it was almost breaking a vow to break her long silence. And the child? Was she not helping, almost tempting fate, in doing what he asked? Yet fate, she told her-

self bitterly, was more powerful than her will; and she could not risk the child's love for herself in fighting with that strong craving of his nature which, as she had long secretly owned, she was helpless to check or subdue.

"Sing!" Anthony repeated; and she sang.

She hardly knew what she was going to sing; almost without thinking, she began the song that seemed peculiarly her own, the song that seemed to mark the different stages in her life, that she had sung when Anthony Dexter had seen her first, that the people had chosen to welcome her home, the song with the refrain:

"But oh for the rest beyond!"

She sang very softly; her voice was husky and trembled; the sound of it in her own ears, the feel of it as it swelled up into her throat, gave her a thrill that was almost wholly pleasure. As she went on she sang louder; the feeling that her singing aroused was not so much remembrance as a re-creation of times that were past; the sweet expectation, the aspirations, the half-formed hopes, the unconscious gladness of those times lived again; the sadness and the bitterness of memory were veiled and dim. Yet memory grew strong as she went on, and cried in the song, and gave a wild note of pathos to her voice; her heart beat in her singing; and the voice that Anthony Dexter had first heard afar off in the woods, had a quality of passion in it now that had not been audible then.

She finished the song, and ceased. Little Anthony was silent; he lay quite still in her arms; the only sound was the soft drip of the rain; and it seemed to Rhoda in the silence, that she heard, as well as felt, the throbbing of her pulses. She began to think the child

had fallen asleep: she bent forward and rocked gently to and fro.

"Sing more, mother," he said, "more."

She sang on. It was not so difficult now; in a sense it was easy; she wanted to sing. She knew no songs but the ones she had been used to sing with her grandfather's labourers in the wood; she sang them all, one after the other; after the long silence this loosing of herself in singing was to her self-restraint as the relief of a flood of tears; and like tears that, beginning gently, wax copious in the shedding, so the force of her emotion increased as it found expression.

As she sang, she did not hear the sound of footsteps that came nearer; her child lay still in her arms, his face that had been so wistful and peevish, contented now with a radiant content; he seemed to be nearer to her, more her own, than he had ever been before, and she felt, and let herself feel, the strength of the newly acknowledged bond between them. For that little while she had all she wanted, and she heeded nothing beyond the present space of happiness.

She did not hear Paul's footsteps as he entered the house; she did not see him, as he stole quietly into the hall; she did not know that he stood in the shadow of the organ, and watched her and listened to her singing. But when the singing ceased, he came forward and spoke.

"So," he said, "you have found your voice again!"

Rhoda started. "You were here?—all the time?"

"Not all the time; you were singing when I came in."

"Tony was tired—not quite well," Rhoda said hurriedly, "I sang to soothe him."

The child sat upright. "I am quite better now," he said.

"Do you like your mother's singing?" Paul asked.

Anthony nodded his head. "Do you?"

Paul laughed. "I like to hear her sing to you." He looked at his wife. "You are going to let him be musical after all, then?"

"He must be as he is made," Rhoda said in a low tone.

"You are right," said Paul, "but you have taken a long time to find it out."

He went out of the hall, up the staircase, and Rhoda put her arms round little Tony, and drew him close to her again.

CHAPTER III.

As long as there is any life in the plant, though it be sadly pent in, it will grow toward any opening of light that is left for it.—SIR ARTHUR HELPS.

AFTER that day, Rhoda sang to the boy every evening. She could not do otherwise, for the child was satisfied with nothing else. By and by he taught her some of the tunes that he heard, as he said, in the air; she fitted to them the words of his nursery rhymes and fairy books, and sang them turn about with revival hymns and the sober, quaint songs she had known since long ago.

Old Wichelow took a strange pride in his godson; more than once he spent a penny in sweets in order to keep the boy by his side; and once when Tony was ill, the old man hobbled all the way from Heather Den to Fanelands to see him as he lay in bed. He tried many plans to induce the boy to spend much of his time at Heather Den; at last he was completely successful.

There came a day when Tony, arriving at the farm, found that old Boniface was not in the house. The

afternoon was hot and the child was tired after his walk; instead of going to seek his grandfather in the fields, he went into the room and laid himself down on the floor to rest. Presently he fell asleep, and when he awoke again, after what seemed to himself a long time, but was in reality only about a quarter of an hour, the intense silence made him at first almost afraid. But the familiar surroundings reassured him, and the silence, after all, was rather soft and sweet than terrible.

He looked about the room, still sitting on the floor; he knew everything in it so well: the shelf with the blue plates, the dark, high settle, the fireplace, bare and empty now, the few stiff chairs, the bright red curtain that broke the hard whiteness of the wall. His eyes rested on the curtain; its colour attracted him; and it had another attraction, still more potent. Behind that curtain lay something that he was forbidden to see; the door that it concealed was locked; he knew that, because once, when he had been left alone, he had pulled the curtain aside, and, trying to open the door, had tried in vain. When he had asked what was in the room, old Wichelow had answered: "Nothing;" but the answer had not carried conviction to the child's curious mind; and the sense of mystery turned curiosity into desire.

After a time he got up from the floor and went over to the curtain. He could draw it aside easily—the rings ran so smoothly along the rod; but behind the curtain was the door, and the door, as he knew, was locked. He put his eye to the key-hole and tried to look through; he saw a space of window, and green beyond, but nothing in the room. His curiosity increased; if he could only know what grandfather kept in there! Perhaps apples, or jam; he sniffed—vehement, audible sniffs, but his nose made him none the

wiser. And then, all at once, the thing he had longed for was given to him. His hand, clasping the door handle, twisted it as he moved; and suddenly he fell forward on his face—for the door had opened, and, leaning against it, he could not recover his balance in time to save himself.

He was not hurt, and scrambling quickly to his feet, he looked about him with an eager, exploring gaze. His face fell; there was nothing to see—nothing; the room was quite empty except for a single piece of furniture in the corner, something like a settle, but with the seat high up and narrow, and the back curiously thick. After a minute he went over to it, the sense of his own disobedience and intrusion causing him to walk on tiptoe. He studied it with grave, inquiring eyes. The seat slanted, and looked as if it must be meant to open; it might be like the oak chest in the hall at home; and there might be something inside; he would see. He put his hands on the dust-covered wood; yes, he could move, raise the lid; he could push it back, right back. Then the little inquisitive face was transformed by a sudden eager light, and a pink glow rose to the pale cheeks: inside were notes, notes like those in the harmonium in church; and a wild, exquisite hope sprang up within him. He hesitated; he hardly dared to prove his hope; then, very gently, with breath drawn in, and parted, trembling lips, he raised a little cautious hand to the keyboard. He touched a note, and sound answered to the touch; and another, and again sound spoke; and yet once more, and once more the answer came.

Then the child turned suddenly from the instrument, and clasped his hands, and fell upon his knees; there was no defined thought in his mind, and his lips said no word, but all his heart cried out in a prayer of thanksgiving.

This was what he wanted, what he had waited for; it made the world stretch out in boundless possibilities. Often and often in church he had looked at the harmonium with curious longing eyes and with an instinctive conviction that he could draw from it other sounds than the meagre harmonies produced by the Vicar's sister; and often he had dreamed that he was pressing down the notes she touched so carelessly, and that the sounds within his brain came out at his finger ends; but he had never been allowed to go near the instrument; and the realisation of his wish had seemed as far away from him as the sky from the earth. But now——

He rose up and stole close to the piano again; he touched the notes tentatively, one here, one there; and then he tried them in combination. As he did so, his face fell again; heaven had not come down to earth after all; the sounds he brought forth were not the sounds his ear asked for; the piano was pitilessly out of tune. He stood with his hands on the keys, his face quivering with disappointment; and then behind him a voice spoke.

"Anthony!"

He turned quickly; his grandfather stood in the doorway, a suspicious, angry look upon his face. Tony did not heed, did not even notice his displeasure; he forgot that he was on forbidden ground, he forgot everything but his own disappointed hope.

"Oh, grandfather," he cried, "who can put it right?"

"What have you been doing?" the old man asked, his face darkening.

Then Anthony remembered what he had done: his excitement died out and he hung his head.

"The door wasn't locked," he said, "and I wanted to see——"

"To see what?" The old man came quite close to the

boy. "You have been poking and searching about in the corners," he said.

"No, I haven't." Tony raised his head again, surprise giving him courage. "No, I haven't. There's nothing to see in the corners."

"You are quite sure? You haven't been prying about the room?"

"Why, it's empty," the boy said.

"Yes, yes, it's empty, of course it's empty, but still—— How long have you been here?"

"I don't know," Tony said.

"Don't tell me a lie."

"I'm not."

"What have you been doing, then? If you hadn't been in mischief, you'd know how long you'd been here."

"I didn't say I hadn't been in mischief; I only said I hadn't poked in corners. I came in and I saw—this." Anthony turned to the piano. "And I——" Then his bitter disappointment welled up and overcame all other feelings; his under lip quivered, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. "It won't play right," he said.

"You have been trying to play the piano?" said Boniface, a faint reassurance stealing into his frightened eyes. "Is that all?"

The boy nodded; his tears would not let him speak.

"You have touched—looked at nothing else?"

The bent head with its mass of hair moved slowly from side to side.

"There, you needn't cry; I'll forgive you; you needn't cry, Tony."

But Tony still cried. The old man took him by the hand and led him out into the room.

"I'm not very angry," he said; "I'm not really angry. I don't mind you being in that room; why

should I? There's nothing in it. It was the disobedience—the disobedience that made me angry, Tony. But you're a good boy, I know; and you'll never do it again."

"But I want to do it again. I don't care for anything else—jam or climbing up the haystacks; it's the only thing I want."

"Who gives you jam?"

"Sally."

"And you climb up the haystacks?"

"Yes."

The old man screwed up his face.

"And you know that both these things are against my orders"

"Yes, but I won't do it again, I promise you I won't—really." The child paused. "By Jehovah! I won't, grandfather," he said.

"By Jehovah!" old Wichelow repeated; "you deserve a good beating."

"Then beat me, grandfather," Tony said, "but I won't say I'll never do it again. I'll never do the haystacks again, or the jam; but I will do the going in there again; I'm sure to do it every time you leave the door unlocked."

"Then you won't go in often."

The child stood thinking.

"Why do you lock it?" he asked presently. "Why do you lock it when there's nothing inside to lock?"

"The room isn't used," said old Wichelow, "and I don't want it used; that's why."

"If it wasn't locked," said Tony reflectively, "I'd come here every day."

"Would you?" Old Wichelow looked at the boy a little wistfully, then shook his head. "No, I couldn't do it," he said.

Tony stood with a downcast face that suddenly brightened.

"Is it fixed?" he asked.

"Is what fixed?"

"It—in there; I can't remember what you called it."

"The piano do you mean?"

"Yes, the piano. Is it fixed? is it nailed to the floor?"

"No."

"Then let me"—the boy's face was aglow with hope and entreaty—"oh, grandfather, let me bring it out into the kitchen; Sally would let me; and I'll never want to go in there again; I won't go, if it's ever so unlocked."

The old man looked at him.

"Would you come often, Tony?"

"Every day."

"You would grow tired of it."

"Oh no, oh no; not if—do you think I can ever make it play right?"

"I don't know, if you have nobody to teach you; but Rhoda—your mother, she used to play; perhaps she——"

"Did mother play it—that piano? Oh, she never told me."

"I dare say she has forgotten." Boniface suddenly remembered how Anthony Dexter had played on the old instrument. "Perhaps you'd better not say——"

But the child was not listening to him.

"May I have it in the kitchen, grandfather?" he said; "may I have it in the kitchen?"

"Yes, if you can get it there."

"Oh, I can." Tony ran out into the passage. "Sally!" he shouted, "Sally! I want you. Come here!"

Sally came out into the passage with a soiled apron and a grin.

"What does little master want?"

"I want you to come and take the piano into the kitchen."

"Bless him!" said Sally.

"Come on," the boy cried, "come on quick."

"Why, it's locked—the pianny."

"No, it isn't, I tell you, and grandfather says——"

Old Wichelow appeared at the door of the room.

"You couldn't get it all that way, Tony," he said.

"Yes, I could; Sally and me together. Come on, Sally!"

"Be I to, master?"

"No. Go out to the long meadow and tell Giles to come here this evening when work's over. You can manage it together."

Sally took off her apron, put it over her head, and went out into the sunshine. Old Wichelow turned to Tony.

"If you come to-morrow," he said, "you will find it in the kitchen."

"I'll come," said Tony.

CHAPTER IV.

To me dim shapes of ancient crime
Wait through the windy ways of time.

AUSTIN DOBSON.

HALF an hour later, Tony rushed into the hall at Fanelands.

"Mother!" he cried. "Are you there, mother?"

"Yes, I'm here."

Rhoda was standing at the table; she had brought in some flowers from the garden, and was arranging them

in vases ; she had on a dark blue cotton gown that contrasted well with the brilliant hues on the table before her.

"Mother," said Tony, "I've found the piano."

Rhoda put down the flower she had just lifted.

"Up there—at the Den?" she said.

"Yes, of course. And you never told me ; you knew all the time, ever since I was born, that it was there, and you never told me."

"No," she said quietly.

"Why didn't you? Why did you know it and not tell me?"

She shook her head.

"You wouldn't understand."

"You might just as well," the boy went on. "You knew how much I wanted it, a thing like that ; you might just as well have told me."

"Yes," said Rhoda, "I think you are right ; I might just as well."

"And you can play it, grandfather says, you used to play it. Tell me," the child said, coming quite close to her, and laying a little hot hand on the table by her side, "can you make it play right?"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean—oh, leave the flowers, mother, and come and sit down ; I want to talk to you."

"But I can't leave the flowers, Tony ; they will wither if I don't put them in water."

"Oh, it doesn't matter ; there are such lots of them, and you can have them every day, and you have put them in water all your life. But my tunes—they always have to wither, and now—at last—— Come, mother, you *must* come."

Rhoda suffered herself to be led over to the window-seat ; the evening sun came in behind, and cast the

shapes and colours of the stained glass on the floor; the same colours and shapes that had lain there when she had sat and listened to Anthony Dexter playing on the organ. Tony climbed on to her knee.

"What I want to know is, if you can make it play right, that piano. For me it plays wrong. Grandfather said it was because I had nobody to teach me; but I don't know; I think——"

"I don't quite understand," Rhoda began.

"Oh, yes, you must understand. It's like this: when I strike—you know the strike things?"

"Yes."

"When I strike a thing that should sound here"—the child raised his forefinger and struck the air—"it sounds here—or here." He lowered his finger a little and beat with an uncertain movement; "a crooked sort of sound, like the noises they make in church."

"You mean because it's out of tune," said Rhoda.

"Yes, that's what I mean; that's what it must be; it's out of tune."

"It would be sure to be, after all these years."

"Because it wasn't played on?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how could you leave it alone? how could you leave it dead all these years?"

"I didn't want it to live," Rhoda said in a low voice, with her eyes on the coloured floor. The child slid down off her knee.

"You are cruel," he said, "wicked and cruel to kill it. And you knew I wanted it so much!"

"If you wanted poison," said Rhoda, leaning forward and looking into his face with half pleading gaze, "would you think it cruel of me not to give it to you?"

"Poison?" the child said, half abashed. "I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, no," she said. She fell on her knees beside the boy and put her arms round him, pressing him closely to her, "of course, of course you don't."

"You hurt me, mother," Tony said, "and I—you're not like my real mother to-night; you're crooked, like the piano, out of tune; I don't—I don't like it."

"Come and sit down again, Tony," Rhoda said in a quiet voice, "and I'll tell you what we'll do."

"Not stories," Tony protested; "I don't want stories."

"No, the stories are no good now. I'll sing, or—or we'll talk about the piano."

The child drew near and stood by her side.

"Will you make it play right?" he asked.

She sighed, a little, quick, gasping sigh.

"I'll try," she said.

Then Tony climbed up on to her knee again, and nestled to her, his head upon her shoulder; she felt he was her own again; and she said to herself that it was no good to strive against his nature, that she must keep him, keep his love, and cease to fight with a fate that was stronger than both herself and him.

"I used to keep the piano in tune myself," she said. "Even when you play on it every day, it gets out of tune; and I had a key—I dare say it is still in the same place I used to keep it, in the left-hand drawer of the dresser—and I used to wind up the strings when they got slack, and so I could make it play right."

"And you can wind it right again, then?" Tony sat up and looked into her face. "Will you come to-morrow and wind it right?"

"I will come to-morrow. Lay your head down again, Tony. I will come to-morrow; but I don't know whether I can put it right at once. If not, we must send to a man who lives at Breybridge and who will be able to do what you want."

Tony's hand stretched up and stroked her cheek.

"Will that make you happy?" she said.

"Yes." He waited a moment. "Yes." He laughed, the little low laugh of delight that Rhoda loved to hear. "And I thought I should have to wait till I went to heaven!" he said. He lay quite quiet and still for a time; then he said: "Sing."

And Rhoda sang for half an hour or more, till his bedtime came.

After he had gone she sat on in the window-seat alone. Always while she was singing she forgot the fears which Paul's curse had raised; the music in her overpowered them; she felt only the delight of the close, answering sympathy between her child and herself; but when she was left alone, the fears came back, and her heart sank beneath them. She sat thinking of Tony's face, of his eagerness, his delight, the new, increased life that music gave him; and she asked herself again and again wherein the danger to him lay; for a man, she thought, cannot lose himself as a woman does; love cannot swallow his life, nor shame wreck it; and it had been the sudden uprising of unsuspected evil, not the music, in her nature, which had really been the cause of her own ruin. The questioning fears tormented her till the colours had quite died away from the floor, and the sun had sunk behind the woods: then she rose and went upstairs to her room; it was nearly supper-time, and Paul would soon be in.

It did not take her long to prepare for supper; the pretty gowns that Paul had provided for her did not delight her now as in the first days of her married life, though still—she could not help it—she took a certain pleasure in the wearing of them; and she did not linger over her dressing as she had once done.

She was soon ready, and she went into the nursery to

pay her usual evening visit. Tony was generally asleep at this time ; she went in merely to look at the little delicate face with the look of angelic peace and sweetness which all children, even the wildest and naughtiest, wear when sleeping ; and always in the morning he asked her whether she had been to see him in bed. But to-night he was awake ; his cheeks were flushed ; his eyes were wide open and very bright. He sat up in bed when his mother came into the room.

"Why, Tony !" she said, "not asleep yet ?"

"Oh, no ; I'm not a bit sleepy ; I'd like to get up."

"You are generally sleepy long before this," Rhoda said. "What has happened ? You weren't naughty, were you, going to bed ?"

"No. It's because I want the morning so. I want to see it again—that playing thing ; and I want to see you wind it right ; and I want to hear—I know how it ought to sound, mother, I know quite well."

Rhoda sat down by the bed.

"Tony, dear," she said, "the quickest way to make morning come, is to go to sleep ; if you go to sleep, it will very soon be here. You just shut your eyes, and you forget all about to-day ; and when you wake up again, it's to-morrow."

"I did try," Tony said ; "I shut my eyes and squeezed them tight, but it didn't do any good ; the more I shut them, the more I heard it. It comes from very high up."

"What does, dear ?"

"It—the sound—no, the thing that's in the sound, the——" The child shook his head impatiently. "Oh, I can't explain it," he said, "if you don't understand."

Rhoda slid from her chair on to her knees by the bedside ; she put her arms round the little excited figure.

"My darling," she said, "I do understand. But do—do try, Tony, to go to sleep."

"How can I try?"

"Lie down, and shut your eyes, and—shall mother sing to you?"

He thought a moment.

"Yes," he said, and lay down and let Rhoda draw the bedclothes over him.

She sang to him till the sound of the bell below warned her that supper was ready; and she did not dare to stay. But the child's excitement seemed subdued now; his voice had a drowsy tone when he answered her good-night; and she left him, feeling sure that he would soon fall asleep.

In the night Rhoda was restless; sleep came to her only in broken snatches, and when the moon rose, its blue, mysterious light gave a fantastic touch to the lonely silence. Lying awake, with all the familiar objects in the room made strange and ghostly to her sleepless eyes, her senses acquired a preternatural activity; her sight in the pale moonlight was as clear and sure as at noonday; her hearing, acute to a point that was almost pain, seemed to listen through the silence with a craving expectation for something that would break it. Restless, hot, longing to move, she yet could not move, fearing to lose that sound—of what nature or import she had no idea—that, half consciously, intuitively, anxiously, she waited for.

At last it came; or fancy indulged her longing; far off she heard, or seemed to hear, dim, yet distinct in the throbbing silence, a sound, simple and ordinary, but which yet, in the night, and to her expectant imagination, seemed weighted with mysterious significance; the sound of the opening of a door. It passed, and the night was still again; but to Rhoda it still lived on;

the purport of it questioned her. What could it mean? She listened. Would any sound follow, that would explain or suggest the cause of it? No, and yes: once more the silence parted, and a faint sound crept between its folds; the stairs creaked; and creaked again. But that was a sound that might mean nothing, very often the stairs, the furniture, the very walls of the old house seemed animated by a spirit that creaked and groaned. Yet Rhoda put a meaning into the sound; to her it seemed the audible impression of a footstep; and the idea grew stronger as she lay and listened. At last she could bear it no longer; she rose up and stole softly across the room to the door; she opened it and looked out into the corridor.

The corridor was the one with the little windows looking into the hall; it was dark; but beyond the windows the darkness was tempered with a faint light rising from the depths below. Rhoda went close to a window and looked down. The lower part of the hall was flooded with moonlight; she could see the stained window like the ghost of itself, the colors faint and strange; she could see the chairs and tables, looking uncanny and half alive; she could see the dark, silent organ; she could see the oak floor with spaces of pale light broken in upon by dark, terrible shadows. It was all quite still and quiet; nothing sounded, nothing moved; but her eyes watched now as well as her ears, for something—she did not know what.

And the answer came; as her ears had heard, so now her eyes saw; something moved through the black depth of shadow, to the left of the stained window, something white came out from the darkness into the bright light of the moon. What was it? At first her heart paused in its beating, and all the blood in her body seemed turned to ice. A strange fancy came to

her: that the spirit of music, imprisoned in the organ for so many years, came forth at night and wandered silent through the house, seeking in vain the far-away human hands and artist brain that long ago had set it gloriously free. Then her sane, waking self rose up and mocked at her dreaming, fantastic self, and led her quickly to another thought that made her heart bound again and the blood run quickly.

She moved on along the corridor with quick, noiseless feet; she paused when she came to the nursery door. Yes, the door was ajar; pausing a moment, she could hear the sound of the nurse's breathing, full and regular. She did not wait long; she did not stay to enter the room, and find Tony's bed, and feel for his little form; she knew it would be empty; and she went on round the corner of the corridor, passing above the stained window, and then down the winding stairs. They creaked, as they had creaked a little while since, though she moved carefully, trying to make no noise.

She reached the hall; she came forth out of the shadows and stood in the moonlight: she looked about her. At first she could see nothing; the little white spirit would seem to have taken wings and wafted itself away; then, as she hesitated, a whiteness moved at the further end of the hall, and she saw her child coming toward her. He was clad in his short white night-dress; his bare feet struck the wood with little soft thuds; he came slowly, winding his way through the furniture with careful precision. She did not like to call to him lest he should be afraid; and he did not speak or stop as he drew near, although, as she thought, he must surely see her.

He was quite close now; and the moonlight, streaming in, fell full upon his face, and showed it to her dis-

tinctly. She knew the face so well, and yet it was strange to her ; the eyes wide open, seemed hardly the eyes of the child she knew ; they were meaningless, blank, vacant of himself. A sort of horror seized her, and then, in an instant, she understood ; the child was walking in his sleep. She did not know what to do ; she knew she ought not to wake him suddenly ; yet she could not let him go wandering about the house, to wake, perhaps, far from the bed where he was accustomed to find himself. After a minute she spoke to him very gently.

"Tony !"

He answered her :

"Yes."

"What are you doing ?" she said.

"I am looking—I can't find it." He spoke in the peculiar, monotonous tone of the sleep-walker. "I can't think where it can be."

She tried to follow his thought and to fall in with it.

"It is not here just now," she said ; "we will find it by and by ; we must wait. Just now you must come back to bed. Give me your hand and let me take you back."

She did not dare to yield to the longing to lift him in her arms ; she took his hand, fearful lest her touch should wake him, and led him up the staircase, along the corridor, and back into the nursery.

When he reached his bed he climbed into it.

"Lie down," Rhoda said, and he lay down.

She sat by his bedside for a long time, listening to his breathing, which soon grew regular and soft ; the dawn was over and the young day had passed from its gray breaking into a rosy sweetness when at last she went back to her own room. She did not lie down again ; she dressed in the sweet peace of the early

morning, and then, opening her window, sat down by it and looked out at the waking world.

Sitting there, the memory came to her of another summer morning on which she had risen very early ; the morning when, wild with conflicting desires and emotions, she had awaited the coming of Anthony Dexter. For half a minute it seemed to her that the time between then and now might be a dream, that now was then, and that the struggle, the choice of victory or failure, was before her still. But immediately she knew—the knowledge grew conscious with a little shiver—that it was not so ; the then was altogether past ; the now was, while she sat by the window and looked out at the fresh day, a little pause of peace, between that black, unchangeable past and a future that was black too, with a retribution she could not know till it was fully upon her.

The shadow of that retribution grew dense as she waited : the scene of the past night sprang up, and passed and repassed before her : and the scene and the shadow drew together and became joined in her thoughts. The one had not, could not have, anything to do with the other, she said ; yet the child's face, with the moonlight on it, would not be separated from the memory of the curse which Paul had called down upon the month-old baby ; perhaps the unformulated conviction that it was the excitement caused by the possibility of setting free the music within him that had occasioned the boy to wander in his sleep formed the connecting link between the two, and was none the less positive for being unrecognized.

A little later, she went back to the nursery, and found Tony awake and eager to get up. She asked him if the night had passed quickly, if he had slept well, and he said yes ; and if he remembered whether he had dreamed,

and what his dream had been about, and he said he did not remember. In the answer she tried to think there was comfort, but found very little.

CHAPTER V.

For we sometimes know what we have done ; but never what we do.

FROM that time Tony went every day to Heather Den. When he grew older his mornings were spent in plodding through his lessons at the parsonage ; but the afternoons were free, and every afternoon, directly dinner was over, he ran up through the woods to the farmhouse. The piano stood in the kitchen at right angles to the window, and the boy would sit and play for hours, almost without a pause, while Sally, going about her work, grinned now and again in a wonder and admiration which remained undulled by time. To her the little master was a constant marvel, and all that he did was admirable.

One summer day when Tony was about twelve years old, while he was sitting playing as usual, his thick hair, that persisted in falling forward in spite of much brushing back, making his head look bigger than it was, a man stopped outside the window and looked in at him. It was washing day, and Sally was busy with linen and a tub in an outhouse. The boy played on alone, heedless of everything but the attempt to reproduce with the failing tones of the piano the harmonies that formed themselves in his brain.

Rhoda had never given him printed music ; though sometimes seeing the printed sheets on the harmonium in church and in the vicar's study, he had begged her to give him music that was written down. But she

always put him off with the answer that he must wait till he was older. She shrank from any direct fostering of his musical tendency ; perhaps in her anxiety rather developing than checking that which she wished to discourage. So Tony played only the melodies and harmonies that he made for himself ; and the making and playing absorbed him completely. He was quite unconscious that he was watched. He did not hear when the man, quite gently at first, began to tap upon the panes ; he was playing an air that he knew well, and he played on vigorously, the thick mass of his hair shaking as his little hands sought and clutched the chords he wanted.

The stranger ceased tapping, and waited till a pause came in the music ; then he tapped again—louder now. The boy turned with a start, and seeing a strange face, stared at it in doubt and perplexity.

The window was ajar ; the stranger pushed it wide open and spoke.

“ Does old Wichelow still live here ? ”

The boy nodded.

“ Yes.”

“ Who are you, then ? ”

“ I’m his grandson.”

“ What’s your name ? ”

“ Anthony Garnet.”

“ Anthony ? ” The stranger looked at him curiously.

“ Who is your father ? ”

“ Mr. Garnet.”

“ Of Fanelands ? Paul Garnet ? ”

“ Yes.”

The man waited a little, looking intently at the boy’s wondering face.

“ How old are you ? ” he asked.

“ I’ll be thirteen next May,” Tony answered.

"That means you were twelve last month?"

The boy nodded, a touch of offended dignity clouding his face.

"Twelve?" said the man; "twelve?" He stood looking at the boy in a strange way, almost as though he did not see him; then: "What is your mother's name?" he said.

"Mrs. Garnet, of course."

"Of course." The man half laughed. "But I mean her Christian name. You know it, I suppose?"

"Of course I know it. My mother's name is Rhoda."

"Rhoda! And—— But does she live here—at Fanelands, I mean?"

"Of course she does. Where else should she live?"

"I didn't know." The man was silent for a little, while Tony still eyed him with interested curiosity; then he said: "You play—that?" pointing to the piano.

"My piano? Oh, yes. I play every day."

"I played it once."

The man stood looking into the room, with a dreamy, preoccupied air.

"You? Oh, do you play?" Tony jumped down off the stool and ran to the window. "Do you play?" he repeated. "Oh, come in and play! Come in at the door; I'll open it." He rushed out of the room and in a minute reappeared through the outer door. "Come in," he repeated; "come quickly."

The man did not move.

"I don't know that I will," he said.

Tony took his hand and pulled at it.

"You must," he persisted, "you must come."

The man yielded; it seemed as though his will inclined toward the boy's; together the two went in through the door, along the passage, and into the kitchen.

"Where's Sally?" said the man.

"She's washing. I say, do you know Sally?"

"I did once; but never mind that now. What shall I play?"

"Oh, I don't know; play—I say, do you know music that's written down?"

"Some."

"Play that then, play that. I don't know any, and I've wanted to, so."

The man sat down and passed his hands over the keys, but without striking any of the notes; the dreamy look on his face grew yet more dreamy; he bent his head, and was silent. Tony stood by in a fever of expectation, his delicate face flushed, his thick, brown hair falling round it like a soft moving frame.

"Do begin!" he said at last.

The man started.

"Ah," he said, "which part of it is the dream?"

He waited another minute before he began to play, thinking; then he played that same prelude of Bach's that Anthony Dexter had played to Rhoda Wichelow many years ago. The boy stood quite still and listened, as his mother had listened once; his face took on the rapt expression that had idealised her face; his eyes held all, and more than all, the wonder that had looked forth from hers. He did not speak when the music stopped; he came forward and knelt down by the piano, and kissed the musician's hand.

The man started and spoke sharply.

"Why did you do that?"

"I don't know."

There was a little space of silence; the boy still knelt; the man sat with absent eyes fixed upon the wall. Suddenly he turned.

"Have you lived here all your life?" he said abruptly.

"Yes."

"You were born here?"

"Yes."

"And Paul Garnet acknowledges you?"

The boy rose to his feet.

"I don't know what you mean?"

"I mean, he says you—that he is your father?"

"He never says anything about it."

The man sat musing.

"I wish," said Tony suddenly, "I wish you were my father!"

"Good God!" the man cried, "don't say that."

"But I do," the boy persisted, "because you play. Mother won't ever play, and father—I don't think he knows how; he never comes here."

"You should make him play the organ to you."

"The organ?"

"Yes; the big organ in the Hall."

The boy's face turned quite white.

"They told me it didn't play." He stood for a minute, his limbs trembling. "Oh I knew it did," he cried out suddenly; "I knew it did and must."

The man sat looking at him in a kind of astonished dismay; presently he turned back to the piano, and went on playing. He played an allegro of Beethoven's; he threw his whole soul into the playing of it; it seemed as though he wanted to get free from himself and his thoughts; and the music answered to his wish and rose up in its might and carried him far away into its own world of undefined emotion. Tony stood by and listened; as he listened, his ordinary consciousness, the consciousness of his surroundings, disappeared, and a new consciousness, inward, vivid, sprang up and took its place. It seemed to him that there were strings in himself, which thrilled and vibrated to the hurrying

notes, and that the strings were strained and stretched as the passion of the music swelled : and he longed for the passion to rise yet higher, that the straining thrill might be drawn to a keener pitch ; and feared it, lest the string should break. As the music went on, the sweeping chords cut into him like pain ; he dared not yield himself unreservedly to their power ; when at last the playing stopped, he burst into tears.

"Oh, I can't bear it," he said ; "I can't bear it."

The musician looked at him ; in his face was the fire of emotional excitement ; it died away slowly, and in its place came a look of reflection.

"He gets it from her, I suppose," he said.

He sat and looked at the boy's pale, thin face, and gradually the silence, the old deep silence of Heather Den, took up its sway.

It did not last long ; soon the man stirred uneasily and began to look round about him, with that dim sense of an unseen presence that communicates itself impalpably to the consciousness. Then the door into the passage, ajar till now, was pushed further open, and old Boniface Wichelow came a few steps into the room. The man rose and stood with his face toward him, but without speaking.

"Who are you ?" old Wichelow said, his eyes both keen and furtive.

"If you do not know, far be it from me to tell you."

The old man came sidling across the room, and looked with his searching eyes close into the stranger's face.

"I know," he said. "Why have you come back ?"

"I hardly know—yet I think I do. I have been staying in the neighbourhood, that is to say about ten miles away, and it occurred to me that I should like to see the place again."

The man paused abruptly, as though he had at first intended to add to his sentence.

"Yes?"

"And to hear——"

The man paused again.

"Yes?"

"If I could—how things had gone on."

"Yes?" said old Wichelow yet again.

"That's all," the man said shortly.

"Did you hear?" asked Boniface.

"I don't know."

Boniface pursed up his lips.

"I don't understand you."

"I have heard——" The man looked at Tony.

"He—the boy tells me that he was born here—at Fanelands."

"And you don't believe him?"

"I—yes, I believe him; and yet——"

"Well?"

"He says his mother's name is Rhoda!"

"And you don't believe that? His face should tell you—if you remember hers."

"Yes, he is like her," the man said, "but I had thought——" He turned to the boy again. "Go outside," he said.

"I don't want to; I want to see you—to hear you play."

"You shall come back again; go now."

The boy obeyed slowly, with wistful, backward glances; he stationed himself outside the window. The man closed and fastened it when he saw him there, and then went on speaking.

"I had thought," he said, "that Paul Garnet might have taken another wife."

"Why?"

"Why?" The man started and looked at old Boniface with a curious expression of wonder. "Why, because——" he said, and was silent.

"Because you were a blackguard, Anthony Dexter," the old man said after a minute. "Well, it would have been sufficient reason."

"And it wasn't? He—took her back?"

Old Wichelow shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose so; took—brought her back, however you like to put it."

Anthony Dexter stood thinking.

"The child is his," he said abruptly and almost as if asking a question.

Boniface screwed up his face till it was a mass of wrinkles.

"You needn't ask *me*," he said.

"But he acknowledges him?"

"Apparently."

Again the man stood thinking.

"I never thought," he said presently, "that he would take her back."

"That, I suppose, is why you left her."

"I didn't," said Anthony Dexter quickly; "she left me."

"I knew nothing about it," said old Boniface. "She went and she came. Paul told nobody why she went; nobody knows where she was or what she did."

"Do you mean—you don't mean that he shielded her?"

"That is what I mean. If you want to know why, you had better ask Paul."

There was a little space of silence; then Anthony Dexter spoke:

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Wichelow," he said.

"I did not expect to see you again," old Wichelow said; "alive, that is to say."

"I can understand that you did not expect to see me ; but why not alive as well as dead ?"

"I never leave home, and I thought if you should ever come here—well, Paul is not a man to forget."

"Yet it would seem that he has forgotten—or forgiven, which comes to the same thing."

"I don't know," said old Wichelow.

Anthony Dexter went out of the house ; Tony came eagerly toward him.

"You are going to play some more ?" he said.

"No."

"Oh, you said you would."

"I don't think so ; but if I did, I must break my word, Anthony."

"They call me Tony," the boy interposed ; "at least mother does."

"And Pau—your father ?"

"Father calls me Anthony ; but I like Tony best."

"Tony, then. I don't want you to say, Tony, that I have been here."

"Why not ?"

"I can't tell you why. Will you promise me ?"

"I can't promise. I *must* tell."

"Why ?"

"Because of the organ. I must say how I know that it plays."

"No ; you must not say anything, either about the organ or me."

"It's no good promising," said Tony. "I'd be sure to say it."

The man stood looking at him, pondering.

"Well," he said at last, "I don't know that it matters ; but if your mother should ask about me, say that I was a wandering musician."

"All right. I say, shall you ever come back ?"

"I think not."

"Shan't I ever see you again?"

"It's not likely. Good-bye, Tony."

"Good-bye. Oh, musician, do come back! Won't you come back?—not even when I am big—grown into a man?"

The musician shook his head.

"Perhaps," he said. "Who can tell? Perhaps when you are a man, Tony."

He turned and walked away across the heath; Tony ran up to the mound whereon stood the fir-tree, and watched him till he disappeared in the horizon.

CHAPTER VI.

Grievous events that from the mem'ry drive
Life's common cares, and those alone survive,
Mix with each thought, in every action share,
Darken each dream and blend with every prayer.

CRABBE.

TONY went back to Fanelands. Rhoda was in the garden, walking up and down a grass path between borders of brilliant, high-growing flowers; she was in one of the wild moods that came to her sometimes, moods of rebellious impatience, in which it seemed to her that she could not endure the repressive monotony of her daily life, as if she must break away and do anything, go anywhere, to escape the dull loneliness that was the burden of her punishment. The moods never lasted very long; always the recollection of those few fevered weeks at Venice, which now and again, by force of contrast, and seen through the softening veil of distance, assumed in her weary eyes a transient attractiveness, scourged her with a stinging sense of shame,

and made her find a certain satisfaction in the consciousness of suffering ; and the nightmare horror of her life in London changed present monotony into peace. So her starved heart, beating against its restrictions, sank back with patience into its atmosphere of starvation ; an atmosphere the stagnation of which was stirred only by the wind of fear. Now, as Tony ran up to her, she turned eagerly from her restless brooding to the one interest that was still left to her.

"Back already?" she said, her eyes full of welcome.

The boy did not answer her ; his look was resentful.

"What is it?" she asked ; "anything the matter, Tony?"

"Why did you tell me——" The boy's voice trembled a little. "Why did you tell me the organ didn't play?"

Rhoda's face changed ; all the wild impatience of her mood was swept away in an instant ; her breath came haltingly.

"What do you mean?" she said in a hushed voice.

"You said it didn't play ; you said it wasn't used for anything ; you told me a lie, mother."

The child's accusing eyes pierced to her heart and made it bleed ; she could not answer him. Yet an answer came ; a voice beside her said :

"You are wrong, Anthony ; your mother never tells lies."

She turned, and above the border of flowers, gazing down upon her, she saw Paul's face. Tony looked a little abashed ; but the sense of injury was stronger than his fear of Paul.

"But she told me," he said, "that it would not play, the organ."

"And you do not believe her?"

The boy hesitated ; then he said :

"Not now."

"Come with me."

Paul turned and walked toward the house ; Tony followed him. Rhoda waited a little while, and then went slowly after them.

Paul went into the hall, and standing on a chair, took down a key from the high, narrow mantelpiece ; he crossed the floor, and fitted the key into the organ's key-hole. The lock was rusty, and the key would not turn.

"Wait here," he said, and disappeared up the staircase.

Tony waited, standing by the covered keyboard and looking up at the pipes above. It was then that Rhoda came in ; she went along the narrow passage leading from the small outer door, and stood at the mouth of it and watched him ; neither of them spoke.

Presently Paul came back, carrying a bottle of oil and a quill ; he oiled the lock carefully, and again fitted the key into it. This time it turned easily, and in a minute the double row of keys was made bare once more ; the dust had crept in and covered them, and gave the ivory a look of age and decay.

Tony's face flushed. There could be no doubt now that the musician had spoken the truth ; the organ played.

"Play," said Paul.

Then the boy stretched up his little, wiry hands (his hands were the only strong thing about him), and with his face alive with expectation, struck a chord. Something was wrong ; he had not struck hard enough ; he struck again with all the force he was capable of ; still the notes were dumb.

"Won't it play ?" said Paul.

The boy's face twitched and quivered. He turned to

look at Paul, and saw his mother standing behind him ; he ran to her and clutched her hand.

"Oh, what is it ?" he cried. "The notes are there, and it must, it does play ; but it won't—I can't make it."

"Did your mother tell a lie ?" asked Paul.

"I suppose," said Rhoda, looking at her husband, and speaking almost in a whisper, "that I must tell him."

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"That is for you to judge."

"What is it, mother ?" said the boy again. His appeal to her, his disturbed anxious face, made Rhoda forget all but her love for him.

"It will not play unless the pipes are filled with air, and——"

"How do you fill them ?" Tony broke in.

"Round at the back," Rhoda said with slow utterance, "there is a handle, and it works up and down and pumps the air in."

"It is true then—it plays ?"

She nodded.

"Only—after all these years, you cannot—it would not play right."

"But I could try."

Tony left his mother and went quickly toward the back of the organ.

"Come here," said Paul.

The boy hesitated, but did not turn.

"Come here," Paul repeated. His voice was stern, and Tony obeyed it ; he came back slowly. "It would be useless to fill the pipes," Paul said ; "it would be worse than useless to attempt to play ; the organ would only cipher. When you know how to play it—if you ever do—you will understand what I mean."

"When am I to begin to learn ?"

Tony's face was grave with purpose.

"I have nothing to do with your music."

The boy turned to Rhoda, his question in his face.

"It would be no good," she answered with faltering voice, "while the organ is like this. I don't think you can learn."

"Can't it be mended—put right?" Tony asked.

"I don't know."

There was a momentary silence; Tony's perplexed, disappointed eyes glanced from Rhoda to Paul; then Paul spoke.

"It can be put to rights," he said, "if your mother wishes it."

The boy turned to her.

"Oh, mother!"

Rhoda stood dumb; she was listening to other words of Paul's than those he had just spoken: "That the music which was your ruin may awake in the child and strengthen in him." Those were the words she heard across the space of years; she said in her heart that God had answered Paul's prayer, and that she could not stand against Him; out loud she said:

"It shall be as you wish, Tony."

CHAPTER VII.

Man flows in a current, woman in eddies.

H. B. MARRIOTT-WATSON.

IN the evening Rhoda walked in the garden alone. The summer day was fading into slow-coming night; everything was still; the sky and the earth were at peace. The rooks were quiet, and the birds had ceased to sing; the only sound was the distant barking of a dog that came now and again across the stillness. Rhoda did not hear the sound nor mark the peace about

her ; her mind was troubled with a whirlwind of questionings, and her heart was heavy. Tony was in bed. Before coming out she had looked into his room, and had seen that he was fast asleep.

As she wandered about the garden she repeated to herself again and again the words he had said to her that evening. She had asked him who it was that had spoken to him about the organ ; and he had answered : "A wandering musician." The words haunted her, standing out clearly on the confused background of questions and answers that had followed them. Was it the boy's own father whom God had chosen to speed him along the path of music ? She could hardly think that Anthony Dexter had been so near her life again ; he would not dare to come to Heather Den ; and besides, by this time he must have forgotten her and that time in Venice. She tried to think the wandering musician had been some beggar who strayed from town to town ; and yet, below all her reasoning, ran the thought that Anthony Dexter had seen and spoken to her son.

Then she faced the thought boldly. And if it were so ? It did not make anything worse than it was before ; her shame was no more shameful, her punishment no harder to bear. It changed nothing, except in the sense that a wound smart's more when it is uncovered ; it did not really matter. If Anthony Dexter had indeed been at Heather Den, his coming could have no effect upon her present life ; all it could do was to stir up the memory of the past and make her suffering keener for a day or two ; and that she could bear. Yet she felt that that was not all ; the wandering musician had opened a new phase in Tony's life. And in this lay the gist of her trouble ; for she knew that when, instead of the old piano at Heather Den, Tony had the large organ to play

upon every day, his love of music, his talent, genius, whatever measure he might possess of the musical gift, would develop by leaps and bounds ; she knew that any further efforts to prevent the growth of this gift would be futile ; she knew that the heritage Paul had coveted for the child would come into his unfettered possession, and that she could not keep from him anything it might bring in its train.

It was very mournful alone in the garden. The night came slowly, yet with sure, darkening tread ; the little thin breeze had a lonely shiver in it, as it wandered amidst the trees ; the copper beeches were weird and ghostlike. Rhoda's face took a more fixed sadness as she tried to see beyond the thick barrier of the years, and saw nothing except the shadow of Paul's curse, that rising from the past, stretched on and on through the life ahead, growing thicker and blacker as it lengthened, till it covered all the future in darkness.

The dusk grew deeper ; the stars showed faintly, far off in that dim fathomless space called the sky ; the night was close at hand. It was sad and lonely outside all alone ; yet there was much beauty in the sadness ; and in spite of her fear and misery, Rhoda could not but feel it ; through all her suffering she had never lost the consciousness of beauty, and she was sensible of its influence even now. Then she heard a step coming over the gravel path, and turned, and saw Paul standing behind her.

" You stay out late," he said.

" Yes."

" Why ?"

" I don't know."

" The dew is thick to-night," Paul said. " It is bad for you to be standing about in the damp."

" I will walk then." She spoke wearily.

"Don't you think you had better come into the house?"

"No; I don't think so."

"What is the matter?" Paul asked, facing her.

"I can't tell you."

"You must."

"I can't," Rhoda repeated, half in weariness, half peevishly; "I can't put into words the misery that is upon me to-night. I know no more about it than you do."

"Come and walk."

Paul walked on, and she moved forward by his side. He led her to the avenue of beeches and entered it. She paced slowly beside him, with a dull recollection of another evening, quiet as this, when she had walked beneath these sombre trees, struggling with emotions that had overborne her will and wrecked her life. As she went, it seemed to her that she could never be stirred by active emotion again. All the passion in her seemed dead. There was only the weight of dread to fill and ruffle her heart.

"You are afraid," Paul said.

"Am I?"

She answered listlessly. It seemed to her at that moment as if she were incapable of fear, as of any other sensation.

"Are you not?" he asked.

"I don't know. I suppose—yes, I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of nothing—of everything; of you, your words, your influence——" Her voice had risen word by word. It was strong now. "Oh, yes; I am afraid," she said; "my life is one long breathing in of fear."

"Of what?" he repeated.

"Have I not told you?"

He answered : " No."

" Do you not know ?"

This time he did not answer.

They both stopped walking, and stood beneath the brown, heavy-coloured trees.

" Oh, you know," she went on ; " you know that when you prayed that curse, twelve years ago, there was another prayer in your heart that you did not put into words, and it cried so strongly that it pierced straight to God's ears and He answered it at once."

" What was the prayer ?" Paul asked.

" You know ; yet I will tell you. You wanted to crush my life ; you wanted to darken it with fear ; and you wanted it so much that God listened to you, and cursed us both with the granting of your prayer."

" Both ?" he questioned.

" Yes ; me at once ; you—I don't know when, but sooner or later, surely." The passion that she had thought dead rose up and spoke through her words. " Do you think I don't know ?" she said. " Do you think I don't understand these things ? Do you think, after all my learning, I am quite ignorant of the nature of sin, and of its workings ? You are wrong ; I understand it all, and the punishment of it, much better than you do."

" You have reason to," he said quietly.

" Yes, I have reason to," she echoed. " I have sinned as you, as no man could ever sin ; I know that. I know that in a man that sin is not looked on as being the same thing as it is in a woman ; and justly ; a man's standard is so much lower, that he never can fall from the same height as a woman—the fall never can hurt him as it hurts her."

" You have considered the subject," Paul said.

" Yes, I have had time."

"And experience, and opportunity, and everything that goes to make a true judgement. And you have formed one?"

"Yes."

"May I hear it?"

She hesitated.

"If you will. Yes, you shall hear it; I do not mind. And what I am going to tell you is not opinion but knowledge."

"I am the more interested," Paul said, still in the cold tone that was half a sneer; she did not heed him.

"I know," she went on, "that no man ever despises a woman half so much as a woman despises herself. How should he? To despise fully, you must understand fully, and no man ever understands how low a woman can fall, nor how the fall degrades her."

"He can give a fairly accurate guess," Paul interposed.

"He can never understand, never know," Rhoda continued, without noticing his words; "he can gauge neither the sin, nor the punishment—the inward punishment, I mean, the retribution that is as much a law of nature as that autumn destroys the work of spring. All he can know is this—and it applies as fully to any one sin as another—that whatever you do comes back to you; that you cannot escape from the consequences of what you do; that sin that smiles to the innocent comes back and grins at the guilty; that evil returns upon itself. And that is why"—Rhoda's words came more slowly now—"that is why I know that the curse which you called down upon me and the child will return upon yourself; in the curse you sinned; in the curse you will find your punishment."

"May I ask," Paul said in his mocking voice, "in what way I am to be accursed?"

She answered him very gravely :

"I cannot tell you ; I speak from no gift of prophecy, but from knowledge of what must be."

He looked at her ; in his heart was a wild longing to fall at her feet.

"Go back to the house," he said in a strange voice.

She gave him no answer but a dumb obedience ; she turned and walked back beneath the trees ; he followed her with his eyes through the growing night. Were those words true that she had spoken ? he thought. Would the curse return upon himself ? His heart groaned within him ; already her prophecy had begun to prove its truth, already the curse smote him as well as her. He could not bear to see the depth of her suffering ; her face as she had stood by the organ that evening had hurt him like a physical blow ; he loved her in spite of himself, and her punishment was his. Yet, he said, he would not forgive her ; let come what would, he would not forgive her ; let the curse work itself out ; it was her sin that had been the beginning of it all. He hardened his heart and followed her back to the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

About the hollows where a heart should be.

R. BROWNING.

WHEN Rhoda reached the house she entered it by the small side door. She closed the door behind her, and went a few paces along the passage ; then she stopped. The hall should have been quite quiet ; but there were faint sounds in it ; after a minute she went on, too miserable to be afraid of outward things.

At the corner of the passage she stopped again ; not to listen now, but to look. In the deep dusk of the

hall, she saw a white figure that stood before the organ and fumbled with the keyboard ; it was indistinct in the dim light, but she had no instant of doubt that it was Tony. Neither did she doubt that he was asleep ; once or twice before, great mental excitement had caused him to walk in his sleep ; it was natural that the discovery of the afternoon, breaking in upon his quiet life, should produce a like effect. It was natural, she said, and coaxed her heart into a steadier beating ; yet still, in this abnormal consciousness, there was something which seemed to her unnatural and almost alarming. Standing in the half-darkness, watching the movements of the ghostly figure, she was afraid ; she knew there was no cause for fear, yet fear was active ; she told herself that dread so filled her life, that she found it in all that happened to her.

Then she heard Paul's step behind her ; she turned to him.

"Hush !" she said.

"What is it ?" he asked, his voice lowered involuntarily.

"Look !"

She pointed across the hall. Paul looked and saw a figure of shadowy white that pushed up the organ lid and made bare the keys. He would have darted forward, but Rhoda held him back.

"No, no," she whispered ; "do not wake him !"

"Who is it ?" asked Paul.

"It's Tony."

"At this hour ? What is he doing ?"

"Hush !" she said again. "He is asleep."

"How do you know ?"

"I know. He walks sometimes in his sleep, when he has been excited."

The organ was open now ; the figure climbed up on

to the high stool before it, and the hands wandered over the silent keys.

Paul moved forward ; Rhoda followed him. They both walked softly, Paul a foot's pace ahead, Rhoda with outstretched hands that implored silence.

They reached the organ and stood at the side of the keyboard, where they could see the face of the player who played without sound. He did not see them ; his open eyes saw nothing on which they seemed to rest : it was as Rhoda had said, he was asleep. He played on, striking the dumb notes eagerly ; as they watched him he smiled ; the pale, blank face with the smile on it, dim in the growing darkness, was a vision of the boy that Rhoda never forgot.

She looked up at Paul.

"What does it mean ?" she said.

He did not answer her except by a shake of the head. Presently he said :

"You had better try and lead him back to bed."

Rhoda hesitated, afraid to do anything that might awaken the sleeper ; the light was dying fast ; she could hardly see his face now.

"How long are you going to wait ?" Paul said at last.

Then she spoke.

"Tony !"

The word was said very softly, but she started at the sound of her own voice. No answer came out of the dark stillness ; and presently she spoke again, louder now, repeating the boy's name. This time he answered, speaking impatiently :

"Yes, yes. Don't interrupt me."

He played on : in her distress, she still had a desire to hear the soundless music that he played. .

At last his hands grew feebler and more uncertain

in their movements : presently they ceased to move altogether ; and after a little pause Tony slipped off the stool, and took his way across the hall toward the staircase. Rhoda followed him ; in the darkness she stumbled once or twice ; but Tony did not stumble ; he went forward as surely and unhesitatingly as though it were broad day.

He went straight up the staircase and along the corridor, back to his own room ; Rhoda, groping after him, was guided by the white fluttering of his night-dress. When he had lain down in bed, she fetched a candle and bent over him, questioning his face. There was no answer in it ; the eyes were closed now ; the expression was one of peace. Rhoda went away softly, reassured in her mind, though her heart was still uneasy ; she felt there was no just cause for anxiety, but still was anxious.

When she went down to the hall again, it was lighted ; Paul sat in an armchair by the table, his eyes fixed on the wide empty fireplace ; he took no notice of her coming. She sat down at a little distance from him, and took up a book.

There was a quarter of an hour's silence ; Rhoda thought she was reading, and she turned two pages while she sat with her eyes bent down, but no word that met her eyes penetrated to her brain. Suddenly she rose up and went and stood before her husband.

"Paul," she said, "does it mean anything when people walk in their sleep?"

He did not answer her at once.

"I don't think so," he said, after a little pause. "Many children do it ; they grow out of it."

She still stood before him ; after a while she spoke again.

"When you cursed him," she said, "did you know

what kind of suffering you meant to bring upon him ? Did you know how the curse would work out ? ”

“ No,” he answered, “ I didn’t know.”

“ Has it anything to do with the curse,” she went on, “ this way of wandering, of seeking in his sleep after the music that was born in him ? ”

Paul answered her roughly.

“ How can I tell ? ”

Presently, as she did not speak, he said :

“ Why do you come to *me* ? Do you suppose I should care for your trouble ? ”

She shook her head.

“ Why do you come then ? ” he repeated, his voice growing fierce. “ Why do you turn to me ? ”

“ I don’t know. All my life I have been used to lean on you ; in spite of your cruelty, I—forget.”

“ My cruelty ? ”

“ I meant,” she said, “ your justice.”

“ Have I been more than just ? ”

“ No.”

“ Why do you blame me then ? ”

“ I do not blame you ; but to be perfectly just is the most terrible thing a man can be.”

Paul did not answer her, and she turned away from him, and began to walk up and down the hall.

“ If it were not for the music,” she said presently, half aloud, “ that it is caused by the music, that all the time he is seeking after the music in the dream or whatever it is that makes him leave his bed, I should think nothing of it, I should only think——”

After a little more walking, she stopped before her husband.

“ I am going to bed,” she said.

“ Very well.”

Paul’s voice was low ; he did not look at her as he

spoke. When Rhoda had gone, and he was left alone, he burst into a bitter laugh.

"Am I afraid of this curse?" he said. "Am I afraid to let it take its course?" He laughed again, a laugh that had a lonely sound amidst the solitude of the big hall. "Do I want to save Anthony Dexter's child from what is due to him? Do I want to spare Anthony Dexter's mistress?" He threw his head back. "His mistress! that has leaned on me all her life and sinned with him! By God! I do not want to spare her. No; if the Almighty answers my prayers, the devil and I will chuckle over the answer."

He was silent a moment.

"Come, devil!" he cried out, "and help me to rejoice! Come, devil!" His head sank forward again; his chin touched his breast. "Come, devil!"

CHAPTER IX.

All delicate days and pleasant, all troubles and sorrows are cast
Far out with the foam of the present that sweeps to the surf of
the past.

SWINBURNE.

At seventeen Tony was tall and lanky, his face, still pale and thin, had lost the rounded curves that had given it in his childish days a semblance of beauty; he was less like his mother, more like his father now; only the wistful eyes and the thick soft hair had stayed with him in his progress from childhood to youth.

He spent most of his time at the organ; though a certain part of each day was still passed at the parsonage, ploughing through Greek and Latin authors in whom he was in no wise interested, and whose writings he could not understand. He was not clever; in many

ways he was undeniably stupid ; literature was a sealed book to him, and his eyes, glancing through its pages, revealed to him no measure of its beauty. All his inward life, of mind and spirit, was concentrated in one channel and spoke with but one voice, the voice of music. Music was a passion with him ; it absorbed his interest, almost his vitality ; under its influence he was animated, full of feeling, of passion ; apart from it he was languid, sometimes restless, generally dull.

He followed his bent fully ; Paul Garnet did not interfere with him in any way. Spending most of his time in the open air, Paul had fallen into the way of sitting alone when he was indoors, in a half-furnished room at the end of a disused wing of the house, and neither Rhoda nor Tony saw much of him. And Rhoda also had given up all attempt to check Tony's natural tendency ; as the years drifted monotonously by her fears subsided ; the sleep walking, which had caused her so much undefined anxiety in his childish days, had ceased as he grew older ; she had come to think that it was perhaps in the checking, rather than in the development of the boy's musical nature, that Paul's curse might find a chance of fulfilment ; and thus she gave him her full sympathy, receiving in return both his love and confidence. Music was, indeed, a strong bond of union between them, though Rhoda was, in this, rather the follower than the companion of her son ; for whereas the mother was musical, chiefly in an emotional sense, the boy was a musician in every part of him. To him music was a reality, and all outside it vague and unimportant ; and when Rhoda was stirred, excited, carried away, by his playing, he himself would be sometimes cold with the consciousness of his own shortcomings, sometimes moved to a wildness of ecstasy that checked the current of her own emotion, and caused her to look

upon him with a wonder that had in it a quality of dismay.

Living thus, in close sympathy with her son, and with a direct indulgence of the musical part of her being, Rhoda's life was not altogether barren ; she tried to think it positively happy. At times Paul's rigid hardness, his polite coldness, the constant remembrance of her sin and shame which he managed to convey to her, the complete separation of his life from her own, cut into her heart and made it bleed afresh ; but as a rule she submitted to her punishment with a fortitude which indulged in no complaint and which now and again she herself mistook for indifference. The years touched her lightly as they passed ; in spite of all she had gone through, her beauty seemed rather to mature than to decline ; at forty years of age, she was a woman with a face that was strange, indeed, but really beautiful, and still possessed of something of the indefinable charm that had characterised her girlhood.

Now and again to the far-off country village, rumours penetrated of the famous organist, conductor, and composer, Anthony Dexter. To Tony, he was a hero ; knowing him only by name, he endowed him with the qualities that he most admired. He sought eagerly in every newspaper that came in his way for some mention of the great musician ; his chief wish was to hear him play ; he was quite unconscious that he had seen and spoken to him.

And Anthony Dexter had not come back again to Heather Den, though more than once he had stayed at the house ten miles away, from which he had walked over to the heath, and, looking in at the kitchen window, had seen Tony playing on the old piano. Tony had never forgotten the wandering musician ; still, looking back, the worn face was clear to him ;

looking forward, he felt assured that he must see it again some day. Amongst the few faces that he knew, it stood out prominent in his thoughts ; living unspoken of in his memory—for Rhoda discouraged any reference to what he considered the most memorable day of his life—it became idealised by time, and dearer to him than many of the faces which he felt himself called upon, by nature, to love.

Tony was afraid of Paul ; there was something in the long dark eyes that repelled him ; he never stayed in Paul's presence longer than he could help. And Paul gave the boy every facility for avoiding him ; Tony's likeness to Anthony Dexter was a fault he could not forgive ; it made the affection between the mother and the son hateful ; if he could have destroyed it at a blow, he would have struck the blow with a sense of freeing himself from a constant irritating pain. But he knew that in Rhoda's compressed heart the one love that was left to her could not be rooted out, and his nature was not small enough to allow him to wound her in petty ways : so all he did was to shut his life more and more away from hers, and watching the boy as he grew older, to wonder, with a wonder half of dread, half of hope, whether his curse would be fulfilled.

CHAPTER X.

Then when the wind begins among the vines,
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
"Here is the change beginning, here the lines
Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
The limit time assigns."

R. BROWNING.

It was a dreary autumn day. The wind was rough rather than cold ; the woods spoke of decay rather than of death ; the clouds were wild rather than dense ; the day was a day of threatening rather than of accomplished wrath.

But out on the open heath that lay about Heather Den, the threatening seemed to have fulfilled itself in a completeness of desolation. It lay, all bare and brown, stretching far away in unbroken barrenness ; wind-swept, unsheltered, covered with a silence that seemed not of peace, but of despair.

Old Wichelow, standing by the room window, gave a little shrugging shiver as he looked forth : Rhoda Garnet, pausing before the door of Heather Den, after she had closed it behind her, drew her cloak round her with an impulsive gesture, as though to shield herself from something more than the cold. There was a terror of loneliness in the far-stretching space ; the spirit of the scene touched her heart and made it sink ; and the memory rose up of that autumn evening, long ago, when, in such a wind as this, she and Paul had crossed the desolate track, and he had bid her pause in the darkness and told her what her punishment was to be. She sighed heavily ; it had been a hard punishment. She let her hands fall listlessly as she thought ; the wind raised her cloak and blew it above her head ; she pulled it down, and folding it about her once more,

walked on. The dreary heath almost frightened her ; she would not cross it ; she would take the way through the woods. The wind was scattering the leaves in coloured showers ; the ground was covered with a thick carpet from the stripped branches, that rustled as her feet pressed it ; the air was heaving with a sound of sighs. It seemed to Rhoda that this active, moving sadness was more melancholy even than the quieter desolation of the heath ; she began to wish she had taken the open path. But it was not worth while to turn ; and the way was not long ; she would soon be at home.

She reached the point where the ground broke away and slanted down to the hollow ; she descended the hill ; she was in the woods near Fanelands ; she was out of the woods on the sad-coloured autumn grass that lay between the trees and the houses. She stopped and looked at her home ; the old house, with its weather-beaten walls and straggling creepers, was so familiar, so much a part of her life, that she accepted it uncritically, as one accepts the face of a friend ; it had become dear to her, sanctified with the sanctification of suffering ; it held the greater part of her life. The wind, sweeping around it, broke off now and again in sobs ; all about the tall, half-bare trees in the garden, the rooks were circling with hoarse, fateful cries ; the wild sky held a gleam of red. Rhoda's face, with the half-questioning look that it had come to wear in the course of waiting years, turned slowly from side to side, viewing all the scene ; then it smiled. It might be dreary out here in the dismal day ; but indoors, within these old stained walls, was a love that kept her heart alive and did not change with the change of the passing year. Paul was away ; he was often away now ; she and Tony were alone at Fanelands. "All the evening," she thought,

"he will play; and I will sit by and listen. Though the wind howls we shall not hear it; we shall be very happy together." She opened the side door; and the organ's voice came out to her, full and strong; entering, she shut the wind out and listened. It was a Mass of Pergolesi's that Tony played; the grand simplicity, the sane, sweet pathos of the old Italian music brought the tears to her eyes; she waited till a pause came in the playing; and then, without speaking to Tony, she passed softly through the hall and went upstairs to her room.

When she came back, Tony was still playing. She sat down on the seat beneath the stained window, and listened to him. It was still early. He played on and on without pause, joining various themes together by means of modulating chords. The organ's voice increased in volume and in strength, the power, the transporting electric quality of it, seemed to Rhoda as the power that Anthony Dexter had evoked many years ago. As the music went on, some of the same strange feeling that had swayed her then, stole over her again. Her heart beat faster. It seemed to her that some curious thing was about to happen. Almost it might be that the years that separated that past evening from this were as nothing, or as the falling of a curtain between the acts of a play. Had that twilight scene been but one act in a drama in which music was the stage, the medium of expression, the voice of the actors? Was the second act about to take place now? She hardly framed the question. She did not attempt to answer or consider it. She sat waiting, she knew not for what.

After a time she rose and moved across the hall.

"Tony!" she said.

But Tony did not hear her. He played on, absorbed in his music; he paid no heed to her call. She came nearer and touched him.

"Tony !" she said again.

Then he started, and for a minute the harmonies came falteringly. Presently, he half turned and spoke in an impatient voice.

"What is it ? What do you want ?"

"You should stop," she said ; "you must stop playing, just for a little bit. It wears you out so, when you play too long ; and besides——" the thought came to her suddenly : "The boy—Alan—he will be exhausted, you must let him rest."

Rufus Stockbridge had developed into a married man with a family. It was a grandson of Micah Yates', Alan Metcalfe, who blew the organ now. Tony played on for five minutes and then stopped.

"Alan," he called, "go and sit down and rest."

The boy obeyed gladly ; his arms, though used to the work of blowing for the young master, were tired and aching ; his whole slim body was weary with standing so long. Tony did not move ; he sat on, on the high stool, his hands resting on his knees, his eyes looking straight before him.

How the wind howled outside ! Rhoda shuddered at the sound ; she heard in it a terrible note of warning ; she thought of the Irish legend of the Banshee's cry ; and she heard and felt some such warning presence in the striving of the wind. How it clamoured at the windows and beat against the door ! How it cried and moaned ! It wanted shelter, protection ; or else to speak the message that it bore. Through the two high windows she could see the gray, fleeting sky, with the torn clouds massed together in great sullen blocks ; and it too was dark with fate and warning.

"Tony," she said at last, "come away, come into my room ; you have played enough for to-day."

Before she came in, she had promised herself an even-

ing during which he would play and she would sit by and listen, as on so many past evenings which made a pleasant memory in her thoughts ; but now a dread was upon her, lest he should play again ; all her desire was to entice him away from the music that he loved, all her hope was to keep him safe in the dull prosaic world that lay outside the organ's charm. She did not know from what she wished to save him ; even while she yielded to the fear that beset her, she knew it was an unreasoning fear ; but it was strong, and she could not fight against the instinct, impulse, presentiment, that prompted her.

"Tony," she said again, "do come !"

Her voice was broken. He turned to her.

"Why should I come ?" he asked.

"I don't know—except that I want you to come ; and we will have the fire lighted in my sitting-room, and sit and talk together."

"Not to-night ; not to-night of all nights."

"Why not to-night ?" Rhoda trembled as she spoke.

"Because the music is strong in me ; because I feel it greater, finer, grander, than I have ever felt it yet. Mother"—he leaned forward, so that his face was close to hers—"I could be a great musician, if—if——"

"If what ? If what, dear Tony ?"

She took his face between her hands and kissed it : she waited for his answer, her eyes looking into those eyes wherein she had found her happiness ever since his birth.

"Ah !" he said at last. "I cannot tell you. I don't know ; it goes from me."

She was silent for a little space ; then she spoke very softly and gently.

"Alan's too tired to blow any more for you to-night,"

she said, "and it is so rough. Won't you let him go home before it gets dark?"

"Alan!" Tony got down off the stool and went round to the side of the organ, where the boy sat on a little bench. "Are you very tired?" he asked.

"I be it, master," the boy answered, "sort of aching tired; it's in the arms and back you feel it."

"Do you want to go home?"

"I'd like to," Alan said eagerly, grasping at a chance of release. "I'd like to sure enough."

"Go then."

Tony spoke abruptly, and turned on his heel. The boy did not wait for a second bidding. When he had gone, Tony went and sat down by the wide hearth, and sank his chin on his hands. Rhoda went softly into her sitting-room and lighted the fire. When the crackling wood and sputtering flames had combined in a steady glow, she came back to the hall; Tony was still sitting in the same position; he did not look at her approach. She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Will you come into my room?" she said. "The fire is bright, and it is more cheerful there."

He made a movement of impatience.

"No."

She waited a moment.

"What is the matter, Tony?"

Tony let his hands fall and raised his head.

"You always seem to stand in my way," he said with a peevish bitterness, "you always have tried to hold me back."

"From what?" Rhoda whispered.

"From my life—from the only thing I care about—from music."

Rhoda did not answer: she turned away and leaned her forehead against the carved woodwork that sup-

ported the mantelpiece : her heart was very sore. After a time she came back to Tony's side.

"Did you want to go on playing so much?" she said.

"Of course."

"But it wears you so—I thought you would be tired. You never stopped once this afternoon, from the time I came in."

"You don't understand," was all that Tony answered. He got up from the chair, and began to walk about the hall.

Presently Rhoda went and stood before him, barring his progress.

"I will blow for you," she said.

"You? You are not strong enough."

"Yes; you know I have often done it."

"It would tire you too much; you could not go on long."

"I could—I can. Come"—she took him by the hand—"come back to the organ; I will blow."

Tony did not move.

"No," he said; but in his eyes she saw that he had already yielded.

Suddenly he stooped and kissed her; and then, hand in hand, they crossed the hall.

The wind was beating at the big outer door; it rose in a long moan that shuddered through the trees; the clamorous cry of the rooks pierced through it, harsh and dismal.

"How the wind howls to-night!" Rhoda said.

"It brings strange sounds," Tony answered.

An hour passed away; the angry day was fading; the mystery that belongs to twilight was creeping through the hall. Rhoda stood by the side of the organ, working the blower; Tony played on, heedless of all but his music. Rhoda was tired, but yet unconscious

of fatigue ; the feeling of uneasy excitement was upon her still. It had subsided when the music ceased ; it arose again, when Tony played once more ; it strengthened as the playing went on. There was surely some strange quality in the boy's playing to-night, some more eager striving, some curious strain of sound in the harmonies. Rhoda thought of his words ; "I could be a great musician if, if——" What was it he sought after ? Something he could not reach ; something, she seemed to know, that he had never even dimly apprehended till this wild evening.

Her excitement grew as the music went on, now sinking low, so that the wind's voice triumphed over the notes, now rising in a force that defeated all sounds but its own. When would it stop ? It went on and on, stranger, more passionate ; it went on and on, till she began to feel as though she were in a dream ; it went on and on till it seemed to her that it would never stop, as though it would sweep through all eternity, sweeping with it herself and Tony, her love and dread, her consciousness of separation from Paul.

How it strained and tore at some answering element within her, this unceasing music ! how it swelled with a more and more highly wrought emotion ! how it cried and struggled after something—some keenest, highest pitch it strove to reach ! It pealed forth till she felt as if she could not bear the pain of it, till she could hardly compel herself to go on sending the air through the wailing pipes, till she felt as if she must cry aloud. And then, all at once, without warning, without end, quite suddenly the music stopped, broke ; the chords shuddered into silence ; the wild wind crying round the house made its voice heard once more and echoed through the hall.

Rhoda waited ; she was stricken with a quick, strong

sense of the fear that had haunted her all the afternoon, and for a while it would not let her move.

It seemed to her that a long time passed in the wind-filled silence ; in reality it was only a minute before she left her place and walked round to the front of the organ.

Tony's face was turned toward her ; his eyes looked out through one of the tall, straight windows at the broken sky beyond ; the light fell upon his face and showed it to her plainly. There was a strange look in it, a look of seeing further than his physical sight could reach ; she recalled involuntarily the picture, clear in her memory, of the little child walking in his sleep ; there was something of the same strangeness that had marked that face, on the face before her now. But then the eyes had been vacant ; now they saw ; then the face had been blank ; now it was brilliant with a sort of shrinking ecstasy. It frightened her ; she felt that the thing she feared had come upon her ; yet knew not what it was.

It was only a few seconds that she saw the transfigured face ; almost as she looked at it, it changed ; and Tony, dropping his head, covered his eyes with his hands. Then she went forward and spoke to him ; he was trembling ; his hands, as she touched them with her own, were very cold.

"What have you seen ?" she asked in a whisper.

He let his hands drop from his face and answered :

"I have seen an open door !"

"I do not understand." Rhoda took the cold hands between her own and rubbed them gently, only half knowing what she did. "Tell me. I do not understand, dear Tony."

"I have seen," he repeated, "an open door. It leads into—worlds and worlds ; it lies in"—he spoke falter-

ingly as though striving to put into words something that by words could not be expressed—"in music, in chords, kinds of chords, sounds—beyond——"

"Beyond?" Rhoda questioned.

She was kneeling beside him now; she still held his hands, but she had ceased to chafe them.

"Beyond is—everything; or nothing; I—hardly know."

She repeated, half mechanically, her first words:

"I do not understand."

Presently, as he did not speak, she said:

"Is to-day—have you never seen it till to-day?"

"Only to-day. Before, I have felt, have been conscious of—of the immensity; it is only to-day that I have known, seen. If I dared——"

"Dared what?"

As Rhoda spoke, there was an undercurrent of consciousness in her mind that wondered why her breath should come in halting gasps.

Tony turned and looked at her.

"Mother," he said, "I dare not go through."

Then she threw her arms about him and clasped him to her as if he were the little child he once had been.

"No," she cried, "no, Tony, no. Stay with me! Do not go!"

"If I went, if I dared to go," he said slowly, "it—I seem to know, to feel—that I could not come back."

"No," Rhoda said. "I know." She rose to her feet, and stood with her hands hanging straight beside her. "I have always known," she said.

In that instant time was annihilated; all the past years were present to her as fully as the actual moment; she lived in them and in the dread that had haunted them; and she saw the dread now, not vague and undefined but clear and sure.

"I have always known it!" she said.

"Known what?"

She did not answer the question Tony asked; she went to him, and took his face between her hands and covered it with kisses.

"Stay with me," she said, "stay with me! Do not let the music take you away!"

The wind outside answered with a moan; its voice still held the warning, Banshee note.

CHAPTER XI.

We make our destiny;
And when full grown it meets us face to face.
We fain would hide us from our handiwork.

THE next day Rhoda, walking on the heath, did not see Paul coming till he was close upon her. With head bent down against the wind which still blew strongly, though without the fierce wildness of yesterday, her eyes looked on the ground instead of ahead, and she heard Paul's voice before she knew that he was near.

"The unexpected always happens," he said.

She started and looked up.

"You don't understand?" he asked.

"No."

"Years ago I came over the heath, expecting to meet you on this very spot. Do you remember? the occasion I mean—not the spot, for you were not there to see."

"I remember," Rhoda answered.

"And you did not come," Paul went on. "To-day I expect nothing; and I find you there."

"Not the same me," she said quickly.

"No," he agreed, "not the same you. Not even"—he looked at her with closely scrutinising eyes—"not the same you I left a few days ago."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"By your face."

"I wonder," she murmured, "that you can read it still."

"Why?"

"You see it so seldom; you look at it so rarely."

"Do I? Well, be that as it may, I can read it easily."

What has happened?"

"Nothing—that I can tell you."

"Why not?"

"It concerns only me—I mean, not you."

"Are you sure?"

"No," she said suddenly, with a quick change of tone, "I am not sure; I was wrong; it does concern you."

"How?"

"I will partly tell you. You have the right to triumph over me; I gave it to you long ago. I will not balk you of your triumph nor save myself from any portion of my punishment."

"Are you so conscientious?" Paul asked.

She looked at him with piteous eyes.

"Do you know," she said, "your sneers hardly hurt me now? I almost think my spirit must be broken."

"No, no," he cried quickly, "it is not broken."

"The wind is cold," Rhoda said.

She shivered as she spoke.

"Let us walk on, then."

They walked on, husband and wife together, across the heath.

"What has happened?" Paul repeated presently.

"I know now, what the curse is that you prayed for," Rhoda answered.

"How do you know?"

"God is just. He has answered your prayer."

Paul stopped short, but after a momentary pause walked on again, more quickly than before.

"How?" he asked.

"By opening my eyes, and showing me a possibility that hangs like a sword above my head."

"I do not understand."

"And I cannot explain more fully."

"You must," Paul said.

"Must?" Rhoda waited a minute. "There is hidden in my child," she said in a hurried voice, "something—a tendency—a possibility; it may never develop, or—it may; in any case it will haunt me, as long as both he and I are alive. It and the music are bound together; if it develops, it will be through that."

"What is it?" asked Paul.

"I cannot tell you."

"You must."

"I cannot."

"And why?"

She stopped and was silent.

"How can I tell you?" she burst out at last. "I have not said it to myself. How can I tell you?"

The suffering that quivered in her face and voice silenced him for a time. Presently he said:

"Then you refuse to tell me?"

"Yes."

"And you," he said, "are the woman whose spirit is broken!"

"I suppose," Rhoda said, "that it is not broken; I almost wish it were."

"What would be the advantage?"

"One would cease to feel, perhaps."

"Is that your idea of happiness?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Of rest."

"Are you so tired?" Paul asked. His voice was very low.

She hesitated. "I think," she said, "I shall not know how tired I am till I stop, till it is over."

Paul did not speak again, and they walked in silence to the borders of the wood. Then he stopped and said abruptly:

"I have something to see to. Go on: I branch off here."

Rhoda went on, and Paul followed her with his eyes till she was lost amongst the trees; then, instead of moving away, he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, and buried his face in his hands.

He had got what he wanted; his appeal to the justice of God had not passed unheeded; the curse he had called down showed promise of fulfilment, was indeed already fulfilled in this, that the dread of it, the watching for it, had added a gloom of conscious terror to Rhoda's lonely life. He triumphed, and justly; yet the triumph had lost the keenness it had seemed to possess when he had looked forward to it many years ago; the devil he had called to rejoice with him in his success was a poor companion at times.

Paul Garnet, sitting in the autumn woods, recalling his wife's words and face, told himself that she suffered as he had longed for her to suffer, and wondered why he did not feel more glad; he did not know that the perfection even of imperfection is impossible on the earth; that as heaven cannot be reached, neither can hell be fathomed; something there must always be to mar the completeness either of love or hate; and that something, inevitable, being inherent in the spirit of man.

Rhoda went on alone. As she went, she met some of the people who worked at Heather Den, going back to

the farm after dinner ; the sight of them made her remember that to-night was the night for the singing. She still sang with the people ; not every night, or even every week now, but once a month ; in the old meeting-place in the wood in summer, in the schoolhouse in the autumn and winter. She had tried to persuade Tony to come with her to the singing, but Tony had not patience with the shortcomings of the singers, and since his childhood she had always gone alone. The people said the young master was too clever for the likes of them ; and though they regarded his musical talent with awed respect, their warmest admiration, as also their undoubting love and unfaltering allegiance were still given to the woman who had taught them first in the strong enthusiasm of her girlhood.

Rhoda's first feeling, as the simple faces smiled at her, was, that she could not bring herself to go through with the singing to-night, and she stopped, with the purpose of saying that she would not be able to come to the schoolhouse ; but as she stopped, her thought changed. Why should she visit her wretchedness upon these poor people who thought her so much happier than themselves ? and why should she try and avoid any of the rough places that lay in her way ? She must go on ; she could not stop till the end was come ; she must endure the hardest ; it would avail her nothing to refuse the less hard. When she spoke, she said to the little group :

“You will all be there to-night ?”

They answered her with bobs and smiles ; and she walked on, telling herself that nothing mattered very much.

CHAPTER XII.

And your sentence is written all the same,
And I can do nothing—pray, perhaps.

R. BROWNING.

THE schoolhouse was badly lighted, with tallow candles that flickered in the many draughts from doors and windows ; the weather-beaten faces of the labourers, the white face of Rhoda, as she led the singing, were dim. The voices did not sound so well indoors as out in the open space in the woods ; the walls and roof sent back the rough, discordant notes instead of wafting them away as did the gentle air outside ; and Rhoda's throat grew tired with the close atmosphere as the time went on, and her ear became weary of the false intonation.

The hour was nearly over now ; the people sang heartily ; it was a favourite hymn and one they knew well. Rhoda let her tired voice cease, and listened, looking round upon the homely faces intent on their singing. There were many she had known young and fresh, that were aged and careworn now ; there were many that hardly seemed to change from year to year, so that, looking back, she seemed to have seen them always as she saw them this evening, patient, stolid, with the coarsened lips and wrinkled skin that tell of a life of toil ; there were many she saw only with her mind's eye, faces she knew so well that it seemed as if they must form part of the group before her, but which would never show themselves at the singing again. She wondered, as she stood, if they had reached that "rest beyond," about which she had taught them to sing, and which the souls, looking dimly through dull eyes, had seemed, half consciously, to long for.

The river, the beautiful river,
That flows by the throne of God.

The voices rose triumphant, confident in their knowledge both of words and tune ; the singers sang out of the fulness of their hearts, and with the full force of their lungs, enjoying the sound of their own singing.

During the last chorus the door of the room opened, and Tony looked in. The singers did not see him ; they stood with their backs toward the door ; but Rhoda faced it, and she saw him at once. His thin face was flushed ; his eyes shone ; his whole bearing showed excitement and impatience. Rhoda made a sign to him. "In a minute," she said with her lips ; and almost immediately the singing ceased, and the voices died away in a faint "Amen !"

The people stamped out into the night, repeating the bows and courtesies with which they took leave of Rhoda, as they passed Tony in the doorway.

"He's a queer looking boy, the young master," said one to another when they had travelled a bit along the road.

"Yes, and queer in his ways, from what I hear. They say he'll play on at the organ hour after hour, and never a rest between. Young Alan, he do find the place of organ-blower a bit hard."

"He's not like she," the first speaker said.

There was a chorus of "No, no" ; and then a woman added :

"Nor like his father. He don't follow neither of them."

"He's got a bit of a look of Jem Laycock," said one of the younger men. "I don't see him like nobody else."

"Him that went silly, do you mean ?"

"Yes ; sort of moonin' look he used to have. The young master's got it too, sometimes."

"Lor', I never noticed it. But you was always one to take up with likenesses, Sam."

"I like looking at folk," said Sam.

"Well, he aint nowise related to Jem Laycock," said the woman who had spoken before ; "so I don't see as how you can be right."

"Taint always in blood that likenesses comes," muttered Sam, while the woman went on speaking.

"He's got her eyes, too," she said.

"Yes, but not the same look in them—not now least-ways ; as a little chap they was as like as two peas," said another woman.

"Well, like or not," the talk went on, "she's mighty fond of him."

"Fond ? she's wropped up in him, that's what she is."

"Let's hope the Almighty 'll lead him to be a blessing to her," said the man who had first spoken.

There was a universal assent ; and then came a parting of the ways, and the singers drifted off in different directions in ones and twos and threes.

Tony, meanwhile, had gone into the stuffy school-room.

"Yes ?" Rhoda said inquiringly, as he came toward her. Her face was pale with fatigue ; it grew paler yet when he answered her.

"Anthony Dexter is coming," he said, "to Westminster."

Rhoda said nothing ; she moved away a little, and making the round of the tallow candles, began to blow them out, one by one.

"Why don't you speak ?" cried Tony impatiently.

"Wait a minute," she said. "I will speak on the way home." She put on her cloak and drew the hood over her head. "Now," she said, "I am ready."

She blew out the last candle and followed Tony to the door.

Outside it was very dark ; but the wind had sunk, and the sky was clear. Rhoda was thankful for the darkness.

"Now," she said, "tell me all about it."

"I have told you," Tony answered. "He is coming to Weyminster, only twenty miles away."

"Twenty miles is a long distance. How did you hear?"

"It's in the paper, the *Brentshire Gazette*. Mr. Gatton came up from the parsonage to show it to me."

"Why is he coming?" Rhoda asked.

"Why? For a concert, of course ; he is bringing his orchestra ; he is going to conduct. Oh, it is more than I dared to hope for!"

Rhoda walked on a few paces.

"Did you—did you want to go?" she said.

"Want to go? Of course I shall go—if I walk every inch of the ground."

She stopped suddenly and grasped his arm with both her hands.

"Don't go, Tony!" she said, "don't go!"

"Why not?"

"It's not wise—right ; I—don't go, Tony!"

He shook himself free of her grasp.

"I can't understand it," he said, "I can't understand why you should want to balk me of the thing, the one thing above all other things, that I have always wanted."

"Ah! I love you so," Rhoda said. "You are all I have, Tony."

"You have strange ways," Tony said, "of showing your love."

Rhoda walked on a little way without speaking.

"You ought to know," she said presently; "you ought to understand that I love you truly; you are not a child now; you ought to trust me. This music—it excites you so, even when you play to yourself at home. If you should go and hear this man play—and his playing is—is terrible——"

"How do you know? You have never heard him."

"Long ago, when I was a girl, I heard him," Rhoda said; "before he was famous."

"You have heard him play? you have heard Anthony Dexter play?"

"Before he was famous," Rhoda repeated faintly.

"And you have heard me talk of him so often, and wish and wish that I could see, even somebody who had listened to him; and yet you never said that you yourself——"

"You must believe," said Rhoda firmly, "that I had good reasons for not saying it. I cannot tell you what they are."

The mother and son walked on in silence. By and by Tony burst out:

"They are going to play the symphony in C minor."

Rhoda's thoughts were busy.

"Which one is that?" she said absently. "Who is it by?"

"Beethoven, of course." Presently he added: "Mr. Gatton is going."

"To the concert, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Then you are sure to go."

"I should go whether he went or not." Tony hesitated. "Mother," he said, "I wish you would come too."

"I cannot," she said, "any more than you can stay away."

They had reached Fanelands now, and they entered the house without further speech. Alan Metcalfe was waiting in the hall ; Tony went to the organ and began to play.

CHAPTER XIII.

I cannot of that music rightly say
Whether I hear or touch or taste the sounds.

J. H. NEWMAN.

It was the evening of the concert at Weyminster.

The rough-paved High Street of the country town was lined with carriages : people had come from far and near, not to hear the music, but to see the great musician, whose fame had spread in an ever-widening circle, till even Weyminster was aware of it. At the inns all was bustle and flurry : so much putting up of horses, so much refreshment for coachmen, grooms, and drivers of flies, had never been known before, except on the occasion of the County Ball held at Weyminster every third year. The innkeepers rubbed their hands and smiled benevolently, and said to themselves that there was as much money in music as in dancing, and proclaimed out loud that concerts ought to be encouraged.

In one of the sitting-rooms of the White Hart Hotel Anthony Dexter was walking up and down alone. He was excited, as he always was before a concert ; and nervous : the artist in him never gained confidence from success ; and no matter who composed his audience, before he played or conducted the orchestra which he had created and made famous, he was nervous with that fine nervousness which fears not so much failure before men as inadequate expression of the gift within.

He had changed much in the twenty years that had passed since his first coming to Heather Den ; his hair

that had been brown then was almost gray now, and sparse ; his face was fuller, but scarred with many lines ; his eyes, always eager, were restless. Success had brought him only itself ; fame and money yielded him no real satisfaction ; in one thing he was the same now, in his greatness, as he had been in his struggling poverty, that he found his only true happiness in his art alone. The man in him was still unsatisfied ; only the artist had ever pierced through the outward show of things, discerned reality, touched truth.

There was a knock at the door and a waiter entered, according to previously given orders, to tell him that it was time to start for the Town Hall. Anthony Dexter put on his overcoat ; his strong hands almost trembled as he buttoned it about him ; he was more than usually nervous to-night. Then he set out to walk through the few yards of ill-lighted street that lay between the inn and the hall ; a little group of curious watchers was gathered about the inn-door to see him start.

Meanwhile the audience, fully assembled now, waited in eager expectation. The Town Hall was full. It was old, with a vaulted roof and wide lattice windows high up in the oak walls ; the bright cloaks and delicate evening dresses of the ladies looked well against the deep brown of the panelling ; and the flowers that bordered the platform, the lights that glowed and shone, seemed all the gayer and more beautiful for the dark background.

In the last row of the reserved seats sat a clergyman and a tall, gaunt youth with an odd face, thin and long, and a mass of brown hair. Tony had never been away from Fanelands before, had never seen a large number of people assembled together, had never even imagined a scene like the present. At first he had been almost awed by the splendour about him ; the gaily dressed

ladies, the flowers, the lights, the bustle, had impressed him with a sense of beauty that was fairylike in its novelty ; but as he sat motionless in his seat, glancing about him with timid, wondering eyes, the thought of the great musician that had been his one absorbing thought for very many days, grew strong again and overpowered his surprise and wonder ; and he sat, leaning a little forward, his eyes fixed on the platform, his heart beating in great thumps as the longed-for time drew on. Many people turned and looked at him, for his was a strange face ; but Tony was unconscious alike of glances and whispers. If the time were only come, was all his thought ; yet he almost shrank from the realisation of his desire.

At last : there was movement and bustle in the room opening from the platform ; and through the open door came the tuning of stringed instruments. Tony had never heard strings. Presently the performers, some forty in number, came in and took their places ; there was a minute's pause while they seated themselves ; and then the conductor, the famous musician, followed them. All the people rose to their feet as he entered, clapping a welcome ; he turned his face toward the room and bowed.

Tony had risen with the rest ; he did not attempt to clap ; all his strength and soul and mind were in his eyes ; but when the musician showed his face plainly, he clasped his hands and cried aloud :

"It's my musician," he cried, "my wandering musician !"

"Tony, Tony !" Mr. Gatton's hand was on his arm ; the clergyman's mild face was full of injured propriety. "Sit down," he said. "Remember this is a public place."

"But it's my musician," Tony repeated. He sat

down, but still spoke in an audible voice : "my musician that came long ago. He played"—the boy's voice was choked and broken—"on that old piano at the farm."

"Yes, yes, I remember ; you told me," said Mr. Gatton nervously. "But you must not—it is not customary to speak so loud—above a whisper, at a concert. And see, they are going to begin."

The instruments were tuned ; the orchestra sat quiet and waited ; the conductor glanced round at his players, raised his arm, and the music began. Tony did not speak again.

It was the overture to *Der Freischütz* that came first upon the programme. The orchestra had not been overpraised ; the rendering was faultless : nor the conductor ; he swayed and guided his players, as though together they formed a complex instrument, over which he had complete mastery. At the end of the overture came a storm of applause, clapping, and cries of "bravo" ; Mr. Gatton applauded with the rest and said : "Very good, very well played." He was fond of music. Tony sat still and covered his face with his hands. He had not known before what was meant by orchestral playing ; he had imagined what it might be like ; now that he heard it with his bodily ears, it overpowered him.

"Very good," said Mr. Gatton again, "very good, isn't it, Tony ?"

Tony uncovered his face.

"What do you mean by very good ?" he asked ; his mouth was trembling. "It's—it's music."

"Oh, of course !" said Mr. Gatton ; but he looked perplexed. He had always said that Tony Garnet was a strange boy : to-night he changed the epithet and said to himself that he was queer.

Then a soprano came forward and sang: she was well, and deservedly well, known; at any other time Tony would have listened to her singing eagerly; just now his one desire was for the song to be over; he waited with a keen impatience to hear those strings again. He hardly noticed when the singing ceased; he hardly heard the clapping that followed it; he was conscious of only one thing—that it was coming now, the symphony in C minor.

It began, and Tony listened as in a dream. He knew the symphony only as he had been able to interpret it to himself on the organ at Fanelands; he had tried to conceive what it might be like on strings; now he knew.

Anthony Dexter had been nervous to-night; his nervousness resolved itself, as was always the case with him, into additional power, a something that made the sympathy between him and his orchestra more subtly delicate, that diffused itself through his audience, that made the spirit of music within him come forth and dominate the atmosphere. There were many in the audience that night to whose ears music was only sound; there were many who, taking pleasure in music, had never been stirred by it to strength of emotion; there were many on whom, singly, the music of Beethoven, even given as given by Anthony Dexter and his orchestra, would have had no effect; but in the hall that night, the power of the music and the musician, joined in one, created a moving influence that penetrated through the whole assembly; as the symphony went on, an electric current of feeling stirred all who listened: and an emotion, which the greater number of the audience, individually, would have been incapable of, thrilled through it as a whole with a force and a throb that rose to intensity.

At the end of the first movement it was as though a sigh went through the hall ; the hush that had waited on the music was broken ; people moved in their seats, breathed freely, whispered to one another, as they broke into applause, and in clapping found themselves again. Far back a tall youth, with clasped hands and a thick crop of hair that fell about his face, sat silent without moving, and looked and looked at the musician with the conductor's wand ; to him it was a wand.

And all through the *andante* he still sat quiet, with his eyes looking toward the platform ; the sad beauty of the movement touched him gently ; when it ended he drew a deep breath, half in sadness, half in content.

Then the *allegro* began. As it proceeded, that strange hush of concentrated emotion spread again through the hall ; the audience sat mute and still, while the wonderful music poured itself out from the band of players on the platform ; the conductor, master of himself, yet possessed and inspired by the sounds he guided, seemed to be one with the music, with the spirit of the mind that conceived it, with the genius that inspired it. Higher and higher the passion of it arose ; there was a feeling in Tony that he must bend and bend lower as he listened, or the power of it would break something in him that thrilled and strained as the stream of harmonies rushed on ; he forgot where he was, he forgot everything but
• a sense of pain that was almost physical, mixed with a rapturous excitement, too wild for joy, too intense for endurance. He could not bear it, he thought ; yet as it went on and on, he longed, while he dreaded, that the thrill and the wonder of it should go on rising and rising till it reached—he knew not what, but only that it was beyond the limits and the ken of the world he lived in.

Anthony Dexter stood facing the orchestra with white

strained face and eyes that shone ; and he raised the players to heights they could never have reached alone ; and he swayed them and inspired them, as though he were the spirit and they the body of the harmonies that Beethoven had heard and caught more than a century ago.

The allegro ended. There was a moment's pause of silence, and then the applause broke forth, tumultuous, sustained ; in the front of the hall the people clapped with vigorous enthusiasm ; at the back, the boy with the thick crop of hair stood up and shouted. The conductor with his pale face and shining eyes turned to the audience and bowed ; the boy, still standing, waved his arms and shouted again ; and went on shouting till the people turned and looked at him.

Mr. Gatton, with a face that was pale with annoyance and disquietude, spoke to him again and again.

"Tony," he said, "Tony ! Remember where you are. Sit down, for Heaven's sake !"

And at last Tony heard him and sat down ; the excitement died out of his face and left him deathly pale ; he was trembling. Through the song that followed, he sat white and quiet and still, and when it was over, he said in a low voice :

"I am going away."

Mr. Gatton breathed a sigh of relief.

"Would you like me to go with you ?" he asked.

"No, I will meet you at the station."

The boy rose and walked down to the door between the rows of seats. As he passed people said to one another, "Who is he ?"

CHAPTER XIV.

And the stars called silently,
And the great deeps of the sky
Cried with a voiceless cry. . .

OVER the heath the stars were shining ; it was a still, clear night ; the darkness was like a veil of peace spread over the quiet earth. Tony walked across the soundless stretch ; Mr. Gatton's pony trap had been waiting at the station to meet the special train from Westminster, but Tony had said he would rather walk home. So he went on alone, rejoicing in his loneliness, rejoicing in the quiet and the darkness, his nerves still throbbing, his brain awhirl, all his mind and heart in the music that had laid hold on him that evening and borne him away from the life around him and shown him things unspeakable. For a time—and the time was not over yet—the thought of the great musician was lost in the music, that music of strings ; Tony seemed to feel the vibration of them yet. He said to himself that his life was changed ; he could no longer be content to live on at Fanelands, with only himself and the organ to search out the mysteries of sound ; the world held harmonies, melodies, wonders of music, such as he had barely dared to dream of ; he must hear and know them, or he could not live.

He looked up at the sky and saw the stars, and wondered whether they knew what he longed to know. "They look both ways," he said to himself, "they have one side turned to that far-off immensity——" Could they hear, he thought, the sounds he hardly dared to listen to ? were they conscious of that vast, awful space that beckoned to and terrified him ? His very blood seemed to sing as it rushed through his veins ; snatches

of Beethoven; and of other music that the world had never heard. Some of it was hidden, Tony thought, in those strings he had heard to-night; but it would never be revealed by them; they might quiver and vibrate and complain, but they would not yield their secret. He laughed aloud; he knew the secret, or partly knew it; he could grasp it, make it his own, if— if he dared. He grew suddenly still and cold at the thought of leaving the world he knew for that other world—world was it? or heaven? or chaos?—of which he had caught glimpses now and again, to the verge of which he had been led by the wildness or the sweetness of some strain or harmony.

It was peaceful and quiet and beautiful out on the heath; yet he was afraid; of himself, or of something—he hardly knew whether it was within or without him, but its whisperings made him fear; he was afraid, and yet there was a certain exquisite pleasure in his fear; for through it all ran the opening bars of the scherzo in the symphony he had heard that night.

It was late; the night lay about him in fullest strength, for it was past midnight, and daylight was still far away. Those stars, whether they heard or not, whether, and whatever they saw, were in no wise changed; they shone as brightly as when Tony had first set foot upon the heath; they hung as patient and as calm as when, many years ago, he had looked out at them on winter evenings from his nursery window. He threw up his arms toward them; he could not understand; then after a minute, he walked on with quickened steps toward Fanelands.

Rhoda was sitting up for him. Her quick ear caught his tread upon the path, and she went to the side door and opened it.

“Is that you, Tony?”

"It's I, mother."

Rhoda held the candle so that its light showed her his face.

"And the concert?" she said.

"Is over," was all he answered.

"Was it"—she put her arm through his, and walked beside him along the passage—"was it what you expected?"

"I don't know—either what I expected, nor—hardly—what it was like."

They had reached the hall; Rhoda put the candle on the table and stood with her back to it.

"Did you see the famous musician?" she asked.

"Anthony Dexter?" Tony spoke dreamily, as though his mind were preoccupied. "Of course, I had seen him before; he is the wandering musician that came to Heather Den when I was a child."

"I thought so," Rhoda whispered, but Tony did not hear her.

Presently he said abruptly:

"Is my father in bed?"

"Yes."

He moved toward the door of her sitting-room.

"Where are you going to?" she asked.

He did not answer her, but entered the room. Rhoda took the candle and followed him.

Near the wall, under the Leonardo head, was the old piano from Heather Den; Tony had had it brought to Fanelands lately to play on when he could not use the organ: he opened it now, and sitting down, played the scherzo in C minor.

"You will wake Paul," said Rhoda.

But Tony did not hear her. He played from memory; he played inadequate chords on the feeble, worn-out instrument; but he heard an orchestra.

Rhoda stood by and listened ; she spoke to him once and again, but he took no notice of her words ; at last, taking her eyes from his face, she stole out of the room, and in the darkness found her way upstairs. She moved along the corridor till she reached her husband's room ; she stood still and knocked upon the door. Presently Paul answered :

“ Who is it ? ”

“ It is I—Rhoda.”

After a minute he opened the door.

“ What do you want ? ”

“ Tony has come back,” she said.

“ Did you not expect him ? ”

It was quite dark. She could not see his face. In his voice was a faint sarcasm.

“ Yes.” She hesitated. “ He is playing.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I want you to stop him.”

There was a blank silence.

“ Paul, help me ! ” she said.

He did not answer ; but in a minute she felt him pass by her as she stood in the doorway, and she followed him along the corridor. As they went, she heard faint sounds come up from below. Tony was still playing. The sounds increased in strength as they descended the staircase ; they were loud when they reached its base ; they ceased suddenly as Rhoda followed her husband across the hall. Then Paul stopped.

“ I need go no further,” he said.

But Rhoda had reached the doorway of the sitting-room, and she turned and said :

“ Look ! ”

The light of the candle was faint, but it was strong enough to let Paul see the face of his wife's son. She clutched his arm and clung to it.

"Do you understand," she whispered, "what the curse may mean?"

Paul answered :

"I understand."

CHAPTER XV.

And thus the whirligig of time brings on his revenges.—
SHAKESPEARE.

ANTHONY DEXTER sat in his room in London. The whole house belonged to him now, but his old room was his working room still. It was springtime; the bushes behind the Park railings were sprinkled with a tender, vivid green; the trees were hardly budding yet. It was getting late in the afternoon, late, that is to say, for March, toward six o'clock; westward the broad road that led past the house in front was roofed with a sky of flaming red; at the back the strong north light made splendid the colours in the stained window.

Anthony Dexter sat before the organ, but he was not playing; he sat idle, looking from the window to the Leonardo print on the wall. Rhoda Garnet had passed out of his life many years ago; he had almost forgotten her, in the sense that she very rarely entered his thoughts; but the pictured face, that was so like what her face had once been, interested him still. As he sat, there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered the room.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir."

"Say I am engaged. Stay; do you know who it is?"

"I don't know him, sir, and he would give no name."

"I cannot be bothered with strangers just now. Tell him I am always engaged at this hour, and ask him what he wants."

Presently the servant returned.

"He won't name his business, sir."

"I don't care about his business. Did you tell him I was engaged?"

"Yes, sir, but he says he'll wait till you're free."

"Damn him," said Anthony Dexter. "Show him up then, and I'll get it over. One of those American fools, I suppose," he muttered, "wanting an autograph; or a scouted genius."

He rose from his seat and went across to the window; it was a beautiful evening. The door opened, and he turned to see a man enter.

"May I ask——" he began, and stopped.

"Do you know me?" said Paul Garnet.

Anthony Dexter paused.

"Yes," he answered slowly, "I know you."

He drew back the step he had advanced. Paul laughed harshly.

"Do not be afraid," he said. "I have not come to kill you."

"No; if you had intended anything of the kind——" Anthony still spoke slowly—"I suppose——"

"You suppose I would have seen about it some years ago. You suppose rightly. I shall not kill you—so long as you keep out of my way. But of that no more just now. I have come to speak to you about the boy."

"Will you sit down?"

"No."

"What boy?"

"You saw him eight years ago at Heather Den."

"Your son?"

Paul gave a curious look at his questioner.

"Yes," he said.

There was a little space of silence: the two men, the

famous musician, and the unknown country squire, stood and looked into each other's time-marked faces.

"He has made up his mind to be a musician," Paul said. "He has inherited great talent."

"His moth——" began Anthony Dexter, and stopped short.

"From his mother, of course," said Paul. "He is not at all like me. He has made up his mind to be a musician. Opposition made him ill; the doctor says he must have his way."

"You do not approve, then?"

"I do not care. It is nothing to me. He has made up his mind to study under you."

"I do not take pupils."

"You will take this one."

"Pardon me; what you ask is impossible."

"I do not ask," said Paul Garnet; "I command."

In his voice and eyes was something of the covert insolence and mockery that had stung Anthony long ago, when he had seen Paul for the first time on the heath; they stung him now.

"You give yourself unnecessary trouble," he said.

"You mean that my commands are idle."

"Precisely."

"You are mistaken."

Anthony Dexter bowed without speaking.

"Do you remember the boy's face?" Paul asked.

"Yes."

"Do you think him like me?"

"No, he was rather like——"

"Whom?"

"His mother."

"He is no longer like his mother. *L'enfant de l'amour ressemble au père.* He is very like you."

Anthony Dexter's face changed suddenly.

"What do you mean?" he faltered.

"Ah, you don't understand French?"

"I——"

"I will explain," said Paul, "in English. I have reared your bastard, the child of your mistress——"

"And your wife," broke in the other with a quick sneer.

Paul did not appear to notice the sneer.

"Not my wife," he said calmly, "my prisoner."

As Anthony Dexter looked into the dark face, his own face grew paler.

"Has she been working out her sentence all these years?" he said in a low voice.

"All these years."

A slow horror dawned in Anthony's eyes.

"You have taken vengeance for my sin," he said, "on her?"

"It is difficult," Paul answered, "to reach a famous musician."

"Oh, you are cruel!" Anthony cried.

"And you are kind. Ah, how kind you were to her!" then his tone changed. "Look here, Anthony Dexter," he said, "when the Almighty pitchforks you and me into hell, I don't know that the devil will take more pride in one of us than the other. And in any case I have not come here to argue the point; I have come to make a certain statement and to give certain directions. The statement I have made; the directions are in regard to your pupil. He will board not far from here with some people I know; he will be trained by his father——"

"Does he know I am his father?" Anthony broke in.

"No."

"Why did you acknowledge him as your son?" Anthony asked bluntly.

"I had my reasons ; they exist still ; but I do not intend to explain them."

"And if I refuse to take him as my pupil ?"

"I will still bring the boy up to London, and I shall tell the truth."

"It does not follow that it will be believed."

"A scandal is always believed ; and he is remarkably like you. Or, if you prefer it, I will come back this evening with a couple of pistols, and we will take shots at one another across the table till one of us aims straight."

"Pooh ! the days of duelling are over."

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"You prefer the other alternative ? But I presume you will accept your pupil."

Anthony Dexter walked to the stained window and back again.

"Why should you want me to accept him ?" he said.

"Again," said Paul, "I have a reason, but I do not intend to state it. I confess, though, that when I made the plan, I did not suppose it would be agreeable to you. He waited a minute. "Your answer ?" he said.

Anthony Dexter had moved away, and stood looking out of the window ; the sweet spring evening light lay over the Park and touched the young green of the bushes. He thought of his fame, and his position, and of the child face that had puzzled him years ago at Heather Den.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that I agree."

"To take the boy as pupil ?"

"As pupil."

"He will be here to-morrow week. There is one other thing. I said just now that I had no intention of wiping out the injury you did me, in the only way in which such an injury can be wiped out. It is not worth

while—now ; except in one case. Eight years ago you came to Heather Den ; you must never come again. If you ever run the risk of seeing or being seen by the woman you ruined, you run the risk, not of a duel, but of an encounter in which only one of us would be armed.”

Paul Garnet left the room, and Anthony Dexter stood looking out of the window into the Park.

Paul reached Fanelands on the afternoon of the next day. Tony and Rhoda were in the hall.

“The great musician will take you as his pupil,” Paul said.

Tony was sitting listlessly in the window seat ; his face was thinner than ever, hollow-eyed and pale. When Paul spoke, it grew suddenly crimson ; he sprang across the hall.

“Did you go to London for that ?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Oh, father !” Tony’s eyes filled with tears ; his voice faltered. “I—cannot thank you.”

Paul eyed him coldly.

“I do not want thanks.”

The boy stood for a minute, the colour coming and going in his face, then he turned and went away out of the hall.

Paul looked at his wife.

“Are you satisfied ?”

She could not answer him. Looking into her eyes, his own eyes found in them what they had always found for the last nineteen years, the confession of her love for Anthony Dexter. He turned away abruptly, and went out of the house, through the woods, up on to the heath.

The sun was sinking and the light was growing cold ; the heath looked bare and lonely. Paul Garnet drank

in its loneliness; the desolate quiet of it had grown into his heart in the course of many years. It was inexpressibly grateful to him after the bustle of the London streets. He walked across it with a sore and angry heart, almost regretting that he had done what he had done. He had gained for Tony the desire of his heart; he had acted according to the doctor's advice. The boy would live now, in any case, whatever life might bring him. That he would be successful in gaining his point with Anthony Dexter, he had never doubted; he knew that his own was the stronger will; and the threat to make public the secret of Tony's birth was merely an idle one. He had had no intention of holding up to scorn the reputation he had guarded so long. But Anthony had yielded almost too easily; there was but little triumph in overcoming so weak a foe. The task he had set himself had been accomplished almost without difficulty. And now he was sorry he had undertaken it; he called himself a fool for his pains. He had done it all because he could not bear to see the misery in the face of the woman who had deceived him. And the woman was false to him still. Under all her outward submission she still clung with her heart, he told himself, to the man who was the father of her child. He had cursed the child, and the curse was returning upon himself as Rhoda had foretold; for in her suffering he suffered; he could not cast her out of his heart; his greatest bitterness had its root in this, that try as he might to despise her, he could not kill his love.

It was dark when he went back to Fanelands. Rhoda was waiting for him outside the house. She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Paul," she said, "why did you do it?"

Her touch, the low tone of her voice, smote him with

a stab of pain ; but as he paused, hesitating, there rose in his mind the recollection of a picture on which his eyes had rested in Anthony Dexter's room. He had not noticed it at the time. He saw it distinctly now—the subtle charm of the face, the inscrutable mockery of the eyes. It had deceived him, that face. He was only the husband, not the lover.

“It is fitting the boy should know both his parents,” he said ; and he shook off the pleading hand and went into the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

What need to strive with a life awry ?

R. BROWNING.

TONY studied for two years under Anthony Dexter, going back to Fanelands from time to time when the great musician went away from London. Rhoda's life was blank without him, yet she said to herself that she could spare him well. She felt that the dreamy, solitary life that he had lived hitherto was bad for him, and she felt that it was worse than useless to try and oppose the force of his musical instinct; it was too strong to be checked, too great a part of him to be battled with ; it must have its way ; it was wiser to give it outlet than to let it work within him and use its power in creating strange fancies to fill and dominate his thoughts.

So she told herself, and tried to think when he was away from her, that the London life was making him into an ordinary, healthy-minded man, to whom music would gradually resolve itself into a profession to be followed steadily, and not a wild passion that altered the proportions of the various parts of life ; and when he was with her she watched with furtive, eager anxiety

for signs of the thing she dreaded ; and found too many.

The idea that Tony should become the pupil of Anthony Dexter had at first been horrible to her ; it was horrible still, but she had reconciled herself to it through the two strong forces of love and necessity. It had been necessary that Tony should go to London, or at any rate to her perplexed and anxious mind it had seemed to be necessary ; and she knew that if he went, he would not rest till he had sought out the man who was his hero, and that he would not be content till he had found the means of being constantly with him. At this time, too, her spirit was worn with dread and with suffering ; it seemed to her that she was borne along on some strong stream of fate, against which she was powerless to struggle ; she was prepared to accept whatever might come to her ; her part was only to wait and to bear, and not at all to will. Paul had decided that Tony should be with his father ; she could only submit ; and believing, as she did, that it was to pain, and not in any way to help her that Paul had come to his decision, resistance appeared to her the more hopeless.

So Tony went to London, and Rhoda lived on at Fanlands ; white streaks began to show themselves in her hair during these lonely, anxious years, and sorrow made its mark upon her face.

Anthony Dexter, meanwhile, had ceased to resent the position into which Paul had thrust him. Tony, with his homage of admiration, his enthusiasm, his likeness to himself, had won his way into the musician's heart ; and Anthony soon grew to love the boy with a surer, more unselfish love than he had ever given to any human being. He took an absorbing interest in his pupil ; he watched his progress, first with pride, then with a mingling of anxiety ; there was something in Tony

that he did not, or would not allow himself to understand. He said to himself that he had been as unbalanced in his enthusiasm as Tony, when he was Tony's age, and that music held him now with as sure a spell as it threw upon Tony ; yet sometimes, when he played and Tony stood by and listened, or the boy himself sat before the organ and forgot all around him in the making of music, there was something in the sensitive, delicate face that gripped at Anthony's heart and made him think of his half-forgotten sin, dimly discerning the possibility of a punishment that would strike down the innocent with the guilty.

It was a hot summer evening ; the grass in the Park was brown ; the dust-covered trees longed for a shower of rain. Anthony Dexter and Tony stood together by the organ in Anthony's room. Anthony had just stopped playing, and he stood now with his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"So we part," he said, "for the next two months."

Tony sighed.

"Yes. You will be happy ; I——"

"You will be hard at work. You must promise me to work hard—at the dry parts, the theory. Do not play much, Tony, or improvise ; and if you play, let it be the old, sane masters, whose music came to them from Heaven. Leave the moderns, leave Beethoven and all who came after him ; forget Wagner, have noth——"

"But I can't forget," Tony broke in ; "and I can't—I must play the things that take me away out of the humdrum——"

"No, keep to the humdrum, keep to the humdrum, Tony. It is wiser, better ; believe me, for I know."

"Yes, you must know," Tony said ; "it must be to you as it is to me, it must take you——"

"Yes," said Anthony quickly, "but I can always come back."

"Have you always," said Tony slowly, "have you always wanted to come back?"

"I should never have gained name or fame," answered Anthony, "if I had given myself up to dreaming."

"I don't know," Tony said, "whether I care for name or fame so much as——"

"As what? But they are the best goal for you, Tony."

"As—— What a strange look those faces take in the stained window when the light grows faint! They are like sounds that——"

"Come, Tony," said Anthony brusquely, "I must be off to my party; and you had better go home."

"Yes, I'll go." Tony moved on a step or two and stopped again, beneath the Leonardo print. "Do you know," he said, "that picture always reminds me of my mother."

"And me," said Anthony.

"You? Ah, yes; I always forget that you ever saw my mother."

"I suppose she is not like the picture any more?"

"I think she is like it still."

"Good-bye, Tony. We shall meet again in two months' time."

"In two months' time."

The next day Tony went back to Fanelands.

CHAPTER XVII.

At the chill high tide of the night,
At the turn of the fluctuant hours.

SWINBURNE.

OLD Boniface Wichelow was very ill. For weeks he had been failing more and more surely, yet he would not own that anything was the matter with him : he clung to life and would not look at the black shadow of death that had already wrapped itself about him. But at last there came a day when he could not rise from his bed. Rhoda, coming to Heather Den toward evening, found him lying in his room all alone ; there was no one else in the house ; the outer door was on the latch.

"Where is Sally ?" she asked.

"She has gone home, to the village, for the night."

"She has no business to go away and leave you," said Rhoda indignantly. "Why did you let her go ?"

"I told her to go," said old Wichelow, glancing at his granddaughter with a half-coaxing, half-defiant look. "I don't like her here—not when I'm ill. I like to be alone ; I send her away every night."

"You must not do such a thing again," Rhoda said.

"Just for a night or two, Rhody," said the old man, "just till I'm a little better. I'll have her back next week."

"Why don't you want her here ?" Rhoda asked.

"I like to be alone," the old man repeated. "I—I don't like noise, and Sally is so noisy."

"Then you must have somebody else."

"Oh, no ; oh, no, Rhody ; I don't want anybody," Boniface said feebly ; his wrinkled old face puckered up, and childish tears fell from his eyes. "Do let me be alone !"

"We will see," Rhoda answered. "For to-night I shall stay with you."

The old man raised himself up in the bed in the eagerness of his entreaty.

"Oh, no ; oh, no," he implored ; "not you of all people, not you, Rhody." He sank back upon the pillows. "Paul will be sure to come and fetch you home," he said.

"Paul is away and will not be home till late. He will not know I am here. And even if he were to come, I would not leave you ; you are not fit to be left." She bent over him. "Grandfather," she said gently, "if you do not take great care, I fear your life cannot last much longer."

A sudden look of terror darted into the yet shrewd eyes.

"I am not so ill as you think," Boniface said. "I shall soon be better." A faint smile passed over his face. "But if I die, Paul will not have the money. Only"—his mind darted back to his old care again—"you must not stay with me, you must leave me alone."

"I cannot leave you," Rhoda said firmly. "Do not ask me ; it will do no good."

"What day is this ?" said Boniface.

"Wednesday."

"Wednesday ? I thought it was Thursday, I thought——" The old man muttered to himself : "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—he would hardly—— Very well, Rhody," he said in a louder voice, "you must stay if you will ; and to-morrow I will have Sally back."

Rhoda sat down by the bedside. By and by she went down to the kitchen and found some broth that was simmering on the hob : she heated it and brought it upstairs to her grandfather.

"I am quite hungry," the old man said, "I am glad you brought the broth. I shall soon be better."

But he could eat very little ; soon he gave up the attempt to swallow and lay back, closing his eyes. Presently he spoke, peering at Rhoda through half-closed lids.

"You must go downstairs," he said, "down to the kitchen and find something to eat."

"I do not want anything to eat," she answered.

"But you must, you must, Rhody," he persisted. "I will not have you starve ; if you stay here, I will not have you starve."

"Very well," Rhoda answered soothingly, "I will go. I shall not be long."

"But I do not want you just now. I shall be going to sleep ; I am very sleepy, and it disturbs me—I am uncomfortable if anybody is there. Stay down for an hour, Rhody. Will you promise me to stay an hour."

"Very well," Rhoda answered again. "I will stay an hour if you wish it. I will put the handbell near you—here, and if you want me you can ring it ; I shall be sure to hear."

"Oh, yes, I will ring ; if I want you I will ring. And Rhody——"

"Yes ?"

"I think—it would be better—if you sat in the kitchen. The room—it has not been used lately and it is chilly, damp ; the kitchen——"

"I do not mind," said Rhoda, "where I sit. I will stay in the kitchen."

"The fire will be company," said old Wichelow ; "and—and it will be cosier if you shut the door."

"I dare say," Rhoda answered ; but when she went into the kitchen she did not shut the door ; she left it an inch or two open so that she might hear at once if

her grandfather should ring or call to her. It seemed to her that he was very weak and feeble ; she could not rid herself of the feeling that death was not far away from him ; and she sat in the silent house with a curious feeling that was partly loneliness, partly expectation of some unusual event, partly a yearning of sympathy with the old man upstairs, whose dying life had formed part of her own life ever since she could remember.

It was the end of September, and the evenings were drawing in, but the light died slowly. Looking through the window, Rhoda could see the wide stretch of the heath lying in solitary peace, and the western sky aflame. The red faded into pink, and the pink grew fainter, dwindled into thin streaks, and vanished in the gray. When the night's footsteps had trodden out all the colour, Rhoda turned round into the room again, and sat with her eyes fixed on the little fire that burned in the centre of the wide hearth ; the faint crackling of the logs, the falling now and again of a coal, was the only noise in all the still house ; the silence that was almost a part of Heather Den reigned undisturbed to-night. The gray dusk that is like the shadow of night, holding the greater part of its mystery and all its loneliness, came in and filled the room ; and outside, beyond the window, all was gray ; and the whole world, all the light and interest of it seemed gray ; the dim glow of the fire was the only little bit of colour and comfort in all the weird monotony.

Sitting there through the dreary minutes, Rhoda became all at once aware of a sound that worked its way through the stillness ; faint and low, it seemed to have grown up out of the silence, not to have begun at any particular moment, but to have developed gradually into existence, so that it could hardly be said in one minute that it was not and in the next that it was. She could

not tell what it might be, nor whence it came ; it sounded to her startled ears like slow, shuffling footsteps coming nearer and nearer ; yet it could not be footsteps, for there was no one in the house but herself and her grandfather ; and her grandfather, as she knew, lay helpless in his bed upstairs. As she listened in the thickening twilight, a slow horror crept over her ; a dread of the supernatural rose within her and held her spirit captive ; she did not move, fearing to turn lest some terrible presence should meet her eyes ; her body, worn with anxiety and grieving, was not proof against the eerie influence of her surroundings, and her weakened nerves gave way to superstitious fear. She sat and could not but listen ; and then for her strained ears there was nothing more to listen to ; the sounds ceased, and once more the silence was master of all.

Rhoda began to wonder how long she had been sitting by the fire ; if the hour she had promised to stay in the kitchen were over ; if it were time to go back to the old man upstairs. It seemed to her that a very long time had gone by ; she ought surely to go back to him ; yet she shrank from the thought of rising and crossing the room, of going out into the chill passage, of finding her way up the lonely staircase. The dusk had deepened into darkness ; all around her was black and still ; she said to herself that she must have a light, yet could not bring herself to rise and seek one. Then at last, through the still air, came the bark of the sheep dog, kennelled by the barn on the hill ; the sound brought back the sense of natural life and gave her courage ; she rose, and groping, found a candle and matches and struck a light.

How different everything looked and felt under the influence of the candle's strengthening flame ! She could almost have laughed at herself for her fears of a

minute or two ago ; the silence became peaceful now ; the sounds she had heard were fancy ; the night was no longer terrible. She would go upstairs to her grandfather, and she crossed the room, the candle in her hand. Then the dog barked again, and in the same instant she heard another sound, the sound of a footstep on the flagged space outside the entrance door. She thought of old Wichelow's constant dread of thieves, and with the thought came another, that the outer door was on the latch ; she remembered that she had wondered to find it so when she had arrived ; but passing in, had given it no further thought, and had left it all the evening without securer fastening. She stopped, and standing a few feet within the kitchen, listened, waiting for what should come.

There was a low tap at the outer door ; it was repeated ; and then after a pause she heard the latch tried and raised. The door opened ; she knew the creak of the hinge as it turned ; the footsteps entered, advanced a few paces, and paused.

Then Rhoda, rousing all the little courage that was in her wondering heart, moved forward with sudden resolution. She opened the kitchen door wide and strode out into the passage : a man stood there and started when he saw her : the light of the candle that she carried showed her his face, a face she had not seen for twenty years, the face of Anthony Dexter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Grief hath changed me since you saw me last,
And careful hours with Time's deformed hand
Have written strange defeatures o'er my face.

SHAKESPEARE.

FOR a full minute Anthony and Rhoda stood and looked at one another in the dim, flickering light of the candle. Rhoda was the first to speak.

"Why are you here?" she said.

He answered :

"I can hardly tell you."

She turned and led the way into the room ; there was no fire in it ; the curtains were undrawn, and the night looked in at the windows. Anthony followed her. She put the candlestick down on the table, and standing with her back to it spoke again :

"Had you any purpose in coming?"

He did not answer the question.

"I should have known you anywhere," he said ;
"you are changed, but you are still you."

She shook her head.

"I am not in any sense the girl you remember."

"Yet I find her again in your face."

Again she shook her head.

"She is dead."

"The memory of her," Anthony said, thinking, now that he stood before the woman who had fascinated him once, that he spoke the truth, "is still alive."

"A slender life," Rhoda said quietly. "You must have read many love stories since the one of which I was the heroine."

"I have been, I suppose," he said, "no worse and no

better than the ordinary man : there is only one love of which I have never tired."

"I know," she said quickly. "Music has always been the strongest."

He waited a moment.

"You know I am married,"

"Yes. You have no children ?"

"No, only——"

"Only——"

"No, none," he said.

There was a little pause ; then Anthony said :

"I must see your grandfather."

"You cannot ; he is very ill."

"I know. That really is why I am here."

"How did you know ? and what——"

Rhoda stopped, her perplexity stifling speech.

"He wrote, imploring me to come ; he said a great deal depended on it—Tony's welfare—that he could not die in peace without seeing me."

"When did he write ?"

"A day or two ago. It was evidently to be a secret, the visit ; I was to come at night ; he would be alone at night, he said, all this week."

Rhoda began to understand the unlocked door and the old man's eagerness to get rid of her.

"It has not been possible to keep the secret," Anthony went on, "but you may be sure that it is not of set purpose that I thrust myself upon you."

Rhoda thought a little. "You had better go up and see him," she said.

She stood leaning with one hand on the table ; Anthony looked at her with many strange thoughts in his mind ; for a little while neither of them moved or spoke. Suddenly Anthony's expression changed, and he made a step forward.

"Where is he?" he said.

"My grandfather?"

"Yes."

"He is upstairs, in bed."

"I thought—I felt as if he must be near us."

"No. I will go up and see if he is awake."

Anthony Dexter, left alone, stood looking round the room, once so familiar; the light was too feeble to reveal it fully; thick shadows lay in the corners, and the blackness outside seemed to force its way in and drown the little light. As he waited, he was reminded of that first evening at Heather Den, when he had been left alone with old Boniface Wichelow in the darkness; he remembered the curious feeling that had come over him then; the feeling that the old man's gaze pierced through the night and that his shrewd eyes watched him. Something of the same feeling stole over him now; he turned to the settle, almost expecting to see the shrivelled form crouching in the corner. The settle, of course, was empty; but as he looked at it, he heard a sound that made him start, the sound of old Wichelow's voice. He turned round quickly. The red curtain on the wall moved, was drawn cautiously aside; from behind it the face that Anthony had been thinking of looked forth, drawn and ghastly.

"Is she gone? is Rhody gone?" old Wichelow said. Anthony crossed the room quickly.

"Mr. Wichelow? You——"

Boniface interrupted him.

"Where is she gone?" he said.

"She has gone upstairs," Anthony answered, "to your room."

"Oh, oh!" the old man groaned. "I thought—I hoped you would not come till to-morrow."

As he spoke, he swayed and clutched at the curtains,

and he would have fallen had not Anthony caught him in his arms ; and in the same moment Rhoda came quickly back into the room.

"He is not——" she was saying as she entered ; but she stopped short, and then, coming forward, went straight to her grandfather's side, and helped Anthony to bear him across the room to the settle. She did not speak, but again left the room, and presently returned with some brandy she had brought with her from Fanelands. She made the old man drink a little of it, and when the ashen tone of his face had given way to a less deathlike colour, she said :

"What made you come downstairs? What did you want that I could not have brought you?"

He did not answer at once, and while she waited, she thought of the ghostly footsteps that she had heard as she sat alone in the kitchen. When Boniface spoke, he did not reply to her question.

"Go away, Rhody," he said with broken utterance ; "I want you—to go away, I want to speak to Mr. Dexter. You should have done—as I told you, not prying, waiting, when I told you——"

Rhoda rose from kneeling by the settle.

"I will go," she said, "if you have anything to say that you do not want me to hear." She turned to Anthony. "I shall be in the kitchen. Will you call me when I am wanted?"

She went out of the room, closing the door behind her.

When Anthony was left alone with the old man, he said :

"What is it you have to say to me?"

Old Wichelow was silent ; his eyes were closed.

"You should have stayed upstairs," Anthony said. "I should have found you, even if—Mrs. Garnet had not been here."

"Mrs. Garnet!" the old man said, a faint grin moving his haggard face, "Mrs. Garnet! But do you know——"

His voice died away.

"You must try," Anthony said, after a little pause, "you must try to tell me why you wanted me to come."

"I came down step by step," old Wichelow said. "It was a long way; the stairs have got so high and steep; and the passage—nothing on the wall to hold by; and I was afraid that Rhody would hear."

"Why did you do it?"

"The money—I wanted to get the money. If she was here, I knew I could not show you, and I wanted to get it safe—upstairs."

"What money?"

"I showed the will to Paul," old Wichelow went on, "I showed it—all the farm and everything to him; only not the treasure, not the little bit of money I have scraped together year after year. I tell you," the old man said with a sudden access of energy, "Paul shall not have it."

"I suppose," Anthony said, "he need not have anything, unless you choose."

"Yes, he must have it; I showed him the will because of Rhody; I didn't want Rhody to know, and I don't; even after I'm dead she mustn't know—or Tony."

"Know what?"

"About Kate," the old man muttered, speaking more to himself than Anthony, "how I starved——" He opened his eyes suddenly; the shrewdness had gone out of them; they had a vacant look. "You know I starved her," he said, "Rhody's mother. Paul told you, he told everybody except Rhody, and I would not let him tell Rhody. But it cost so much, the firing and

the wine and things, and I—could not—and she died.” A spasm of fear darted across the dim eyes. “You won’t tell Rhody?”

“No.” Anthony paused. “But the reason,” he added, “the reason of your sending for me?”

“I didn’t send, I—— Are you Anthony Dexter?” the old man answered suddenly, with a partial return of intelligence to his shrivelled face.

“I am Anthony Dexter, and you wrote to me——”

“Yes, yes, I know. It was to tell you a secret. Bend lower. Tony is your son, not Paul’s—your son by Paul Garnet’s wife.”

The old man tried to laugh, but his voice died away. Anthony Dexter, looking down at the malicious, pitiful face, felt that his sin had never seemed to him so ugly as it seemed now.

“I like Tony,” old Wichelow went on presently; “I like him all the more because Paul is not his father. My savings are for him. Rhody cannot have them because of Paul, so I will give them to Tony. You must give them.”

“I can have nothing to——”

“I cannot leave them,” the old man continued; “Paul would be sure to find them. I cannot leave them—in there—where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt; I must give them—and Tony—is the best.”

“It would be better,” said Anthony, “to send for Tony.”

“No, no; Tony must not know, not till I’m dead. If I sent for him and told him, Paul would know. Paul reads into people. He would find it out. You must see—where it is, and tell Tony—after I am dead. He can take it away and hide it—safe from Paul.” The old man made an attempt to rise. “I must show you,” he said.

"You cannot walk."

"Yes, I can, I——" Old Wichelow sauk back. "I can't," he said, "I can't." Presently he spoke in a whisper. "Go in," he said, "and see."

"Where?"

"There—the curtain—Rhody——"

Anthony Dexter supposed that it was the room that had been Rhoda's into which he was to go. He went over to the curtain and drew it aside. The door behind was open; on the floor of the empty room beyond stood a candlestick with a little bit of burning candle; beside it lay a piece of crooked iron; there was nothing else to be seen. He walked over to the corner where the candle stood and looked about him; he stooped down and examined the floor, and found at last the loosened stone, which the old man, in his weakness, had not been able to raise.

He lifted it up, and old Wichelow's hiding-place was revealed to him. The tobacco pouch lay on the top; below it was a heap of gold and silver; it was a long time since the old man had been strong enough to journey into Breybridge and change his hoardings into the less bulky form of notes, and he liked the feel and sight of the gold. Anthony Dexter did not look long into the hole; he replaced the stone and returned to the room.

The old man lay on the settle with his eyes closed.

"I have seen it," Anthony said.

Old Wichelow murmured feebly something that he could not hear, but presently opened his eyes again and spoke in a louder tone:

"You will bring him, show him yourself," he said.

"You will promise——"

"I shall never come here again," Anthony answered.

"I will see that he knows; more I cannot do."

"But you must!" All the old man's failing strength seemed to gather in his entreaty. "You must come yourself—I cannot be sure, I cannot die—and you treated me—behaved badly—you must do it; it is all you can do." His hand clutched Anthony's; his eyes looked into Anthony's eyes with a strange force of command. "Promise me," he said; "for the sake of the wrong you did Rhody, promise!"

Anthony Dexter thought of the girl's face that had looked forth at him through the worn features of the woman he had seen that evening, and he thought of a punishment of his sin that he had seen, dimly threatening, in Tony's eyes, and he answered:

"I will show him, myself."

Boniface lay back, a look of relief on his face. Anthony waited a minute, and then crossed the room and opened the door into the passage. Rhoda heard the opening of the door and came out of the kitchen.

"Your grandfather is very ill," Anthony said; "he wanders, is hardly conscious."

Rhoda followed him back to the settle.

"He must stay here," she said; "it would be impossible to get him back to bed. I will fetch some covering."

She went upstairs, and presently returned with a pillow and some blankets. She put the pillow under her grandfather's head and covered him over; then she turned to Anthony.

"Was he able to say what he wanted to?"

"Yes."

"Then"—she paused—"there is no reason——"

"You mean I am to go?"

She bent her head. As she stood in the faint light, her attitude, the outline of her face, reminded him strangely of the girl who had puzzled and attracted him long ago.

"I wonder if I ever understood you!" he exclaimed.

"No, we neither of us understood either ourselves or each other or the meaning of life."

"Do you understand it better now, I wonder?" he said, still lingering.

"I think so."

"Can you explain? can you impart your understanding? for I confess that I still do not understand either myself or you or life generally."

"Hardly; for my understanding is chiefly the knowledge that I cannot understand."

"Not a great advance," he said.

"I know," she went on, "that sin brings suffering, and that suffering either destroys or strengthens. Why it should be so, what it all means, why there should be such a strange conflict of good and evil within us, I do not know, and in the much time that I have had to think about it, I have got no further than, as I said, to know that I cannot understand."

"You are metaphysical," he said, his eyes on her still, impressive face.

"You use words that are strange to me," she answered; "but it is something to have learned to submit."

"To Paul?" he asked, a faint sarcasm in his voice.

"No, not to Paul—only."

"You are content then to bear whatever comes?"

"Content and I," she said, "were parted long ago; but I am willing."

"To bear?"

"Yes; and wait."

"For what?"

She looked at him, but she did not speak, and he did not repeat his question.

"You are wiser than I," he said, half in mockery, yet with a sigh.

She answered him almost as she might have done twenty years ago.

"Perhaps," she said.

CHAPTER XIX.

This silence pours a solitariness
Into the very essence of my soul.

J. H. NEWMAN.

RHODA, standing in the middle of the room, heard Anthony Dexter's footsteps go down the stone passage, and pause as he groped for the latch of the door; then, in a minute, she heard the door bang to, and she knew that she was alone again with the prostrate figure on the settle. It seemed to her that she could see all through the silent house, into each empty room and feel the emptiness; and that she could see through the lonely woods and across the wide heath, with the one man going farther and farther away; all the solitary midnight stillness for miles around was open to her consciousness. Yet she was no longer afraid. The horror that had fastened upon her as she watched by the kitchen fire had passed away now that she knew whose were the footsteps that had shuffled through the silence; and all her life she had been used to the remoteness of Heather Den; the thought of the miles of loneliness between the farmhouse and any other dwelling was a thought that had in it no sense of fear. She was conscious of her solitude but not afraid of it.

She turned to the settle and kneeled down beside it. Old Wichelow's eyes were still closed; his worn face was still. Rhoda spoke to him:

"Grandfather!"

He took no heed of her voice, but when she repeated her call, he stirred slightly and his lips moved.

"Can you hear—understand me?" she asked.

The old man's eyelids quivered and half unclosed.

"For Tony," he muttered. "Take it away quick, or Paul—his eyes see—into everything."

Rhoda turned away and went over to the table to fetch the glass of brandy she had left there. All at once a sudden spasm of energy seemed to shoot through old Wichelow's frail body; his eyes opened wide and he raised himself almost into a sitting posture, though his head still drooped; as Rhoda, in surprised alarm, hurried toward him, he rose to his feet and staggered toward her. She seized his arm and held him up with difficulty.

"Come back," she said, "you cannot walk, or even stand."

"The stone," old Wichelow said; "I did not finish—and the candle—Paul would be sure to find the candle and know——"

His limbs gave way beneath him; he sank upon the ground; Rhoda's strength was insufficient to save him, and all she could do was to lessen the shock of his fall.

He lay quite still, his face working feebly, his dim, eager eyes closed again. Rhoda sat down on the floor beside him and raised his head into her lap.

For a few minutes they both remained motionless; the shadows were thick and wide; in the intense stillness Rhoda could hear across the passage the faint, continuous ticking of the kitchen clock. She sat considering what she could do; she had almost decided to make an effort to rise, when all at once her grandfather's eyes opened, and he raised his head a little and looked into her face.

"Rhody?" he said.

"Yes, it is I."

There was a strange, half yearning look in the old man's eyes, a world of unuttered meaning. He repeated her name: "Rhody," in a feeble whispering voice; then his head fell back into her lap again and lay there heavy and still; and she knew that he was dead.

The eyes that had been so shrewd and keen were still open; she bent forward and closed them; and then she sat on in the stillness, only half realising what had happened; listening to the steady ticking of the clock in the kitchen, looking across the half-lighted space of the room to the dark, blank night at the window. She sat on as in a dream, while the candle burned lower and lower, and the shadows crept up the walls; then at last the feeble wick flickered and went out, and she was left in utter darkness. Now that the light had gone, she felt she could not stir; she could not rise and move away through the darkness and leave that lifeless figure lying lonely on the ground; and all night long she sat upon the floor with the dead head in her lap.

The darkness lasted a long time; she was not afraid, though fear was not far away from her. She looked back along the path of her life to the days when her grandfather had been her only companion, and her thoughts came on step by step through the storm and shame that had followed the awakening of her nature, on through the blank years of punishment, with the burden of Paul's scorn pressing down upon her, and the dread of Paul's curse making the outlook dark.

When at last the dawn broke in gray upon the darkness, she still sat motionless, while gradually the quiet figure became visible and the dead face was revealed. It was quite light when at last she moved; the sun, rising at the back of the house, threw a widening line of

light across the far edge of the heath; the singing of birds rang through the morning air. When she tried to rise, she became aware that she was cold and stiff; her cramped, numb limbs refused to do her bidding; it was with difficulty that she stood upright.

She went across to the window on which her eyes had gazed so long, and threw it open. The morning air held all the crisp sweetness of early autumn; she drank it in with delight; and the look of the calm heath, with the sunlight spreading over it, was pleasant to her eyes. She only stood a minute by the window; presently she went upstairs and fetched a sheet, and covered the face and form of the dead man out of sight.

Then she sat down to wait till Sally should return, or some of the labourers should come to their daily work; she had a feeling that she could not leave the corpse alone in the house. But the labourers did not pass within her sight or hearing, and by eight o'clock Sally had not come. Rhoda went into the larder and found some milk and bread, and revived the strength that now, after her night's watching, her agitation, her long abstinence, she felt was failing her.

It was half-past eight before anybody came. Turning her head at the sound of footsteps, she saw Paul pass the window. She did not go out into the passage, knowing that the door was on the latch; but she rose from her seat and came a few steps forward.

Paul came up the passage and stopped before crossing the threshold of the room; he spoke to her through the doorway.

"I have only just heard you were here," he said.

She looked at him without speaking: now that she was no longer alone, she began to know how lonely she had been. It would have been a relief to let the strain on her nerves relax in a burst of tears; but she drove

back the tears and stood composed and calm; only for the moment she could not speak.

"Why did you stay?" Paul said.

"Grandfather is dead," she answered.

She turned and led the way across the room and pointed to the still figure on the floor, undefined beneath its white covering.

"He came down; and he fell; and then—afterward—I could not move him," she said.

"Did he die there, lying on the floor?" Paul asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Long ago; it was some time in the night; I don't know."

Paul left the room and went out of the house, through the farmyard, up to the fields where the men were working. Rhoda went to the window again and looked out at the familiar view; she was thinking, for the first time since he had left the house, of Anthony Dexter's visit.

By and by Paul came back with one or two of the labourers, open-mouthed, wondering, and awed; and old Boniface Wichelow's worn-out body was carried upstairs and laid upon the bed where it had often shivered on winter nights for lack of food and warmth.

When the men had left the house again, Paul came back into the room.

"Where's Sally?" he asked.

"Hasn't she come back?"

"Come back? Where from?"

"He—grandfather, would not let her sleep here; for the last few nights he has sent her down to her sister's."

"What on earth——" Paul began, but stopped and added quickly: "Then you have been here alone all night?"

Rhoda's heart stood still; then it thumped on again and the blood came in a great rush to her face. She realised in a moment what the question would lead to; in less than a moment she resolved what to do; and the resolution was as firm as it was quick.

"No," she said.

"Who was with you?"

She paused for one instant.

"Anthony Dexter."

There was a long silence. Rhoda leaned against the frame of the window; her eyes were on the ground. At last Paul spoke.

"How long had the meeting been arranged?"

"I don't know." All at once she looked up. "Grandfather had written to him—begged him—I don't know why——"

"To come here?"

She bent her head.

"Of course," Paul said, a sharp irony in his tone, "you did not know of his coming when you decided to stay? or did you, perhaps, not arrive at the decision till he was here?"

She looked him full in the face, but she did not speak. He waited a minute and then came close to her.

"You will tell me, perhaps," he laughed, "that you had forgotten him?"

"No," she answered, "I cannot tell you that."

The sarcasm in Paul's voice gave way to a grim bitterness.

"I knew," he said, "that you had not forgotten."

She answered:

"You have not allowed me to forget."

"I knew," he went on, not heeding her, "that you had never repented of your sin, but only of its consequences; I knew that, though you have suffered under

the punishment, you have still clung with your heart to the memory of the man who ruined you; I knew and know that you love him still. Do not trouble to deny it. I have almost ceased to blame you; I know you must fulfil your nature; and it is not worth a lie."

"I will deny nothing," Rhoda said, "to such an accuser."

"You deny by implication; but see, I will be just, perfectly just. If you will look into my eyes and tell me that you have lost the power to love, I will believe you; to love, I mean, any man but your own son."

She looked at him with a strange sadness in her eyes; she spoke in a whisper.

"Alas! I cannot say it."

Paul Garnet broke into a laugh, loud and hard.

"There is only one thing you have really forgotten," he said, "and that is that I have always been able to read your thoughts."

To that she made no answer; but presently she crossed the room, and with the words: "I hear Sally in the kitchen," left him alone.

CHAPTER XX.

I hang 'mid men my needless head,
And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread.

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

ALL through the time of old Wichelow's illness Tony had been much alone. Paul had been away the greater part of the last month, and every day Rhoda had gone to Heather Den, so Tony had Fanelands, with its large hall and its rows of empty rooms, chiefly to himself. He spent most of the September days indoors. Outside, the sunshine lay warm and bright upon the half-

wild garden, upon the stretches of grass, upon the changing trees; in the house it lay only in patches upon the dark floors, and showed in streams of rainbow light the always rising, indestructible dust. But Tony liked the subdued atmosphere and the loneliness; he liked being left to himself; he liked to be free to follow out the thoughts, which were hardly thoughts so much as emotional conceptions embodied in musical sounds.

When he had first come home, he had tried to carry out his master's instructions; he had set himself to the study of the theory of his art; he had refrained from indulging his imagination by letting it speak with the organ's voice; he had played but little, and only music of the austere, simplest kind. But soon the strength of his endeavour relaxed; even the influence of Anthony Dexter could not restrain him from yielding to the stress of the musical power within; and gradually he drew back into the world of sound which was for him more real even than the world of affection.

He was composing a symphony; he had as yet given none of it the silent yet only sure life of being written down on paper, but it grew and grew in his brain. He heard it when he walked through the silent, sun-patched corridors, dead to the pure open rejoicing of the noonday outside; he heard it when he sat before the organ in the twilight and let his inward sight look far away through the sounds that his fingers drew from the pipes; he heard it when he awoke at early dawn and watched the gradual waking of the day; and stealing down before the household was astir, sought to give voice to some of the harmonies that fretted him, through the worn old piano that had been his first interpreter.

He had finished the two first movements; he had heard them in imagination played on a full orchestra; he knew just how they would sound; when he went

back to London, he said, he would write them down and show this outcome of himself to the master he loved. Now he had come to the third movement: it was allegro; it was to be finer, more wonderful than anything he had yet dreamed of. Dimly he conceived what it might and ought to be, yet could not quite grasp nor distinctly hear the music that seemed to whisper about him when he awaked, and swept in fleeting, exquisite strains through dreams that he could neither retain nor recall.

It was two days after Boniface Wichelow's funeral. Tony had had a letter from Anthony Dexter; he heard from the musician about once a week, and the letters always pleased and interested him, and drew his thoughts for a space outside the world of his musical consciousness; but the letter to-day had positively excited him. For a time he forgot his allegro; and when Rhoda, always anxious to draw him away from his music, came to him and begged him to spend part of the fine afternoon in a walk across the heath, he consented almost at once, and when he found himself out in the free air and the sunshine, enjoyed it unconsciously.

Rhoda knew he had had a letter from his father; but she never made any reference to Anthony's letters. Generally Tony, brimming over with hero-worship, would repeat to her some of the contents; to-day he had made no mention of them.

As the afternoon wore on, Rhoda, tired of the quiet house, went out into the garden. The autumn flowers were gay, and the sunshine was continuous and brilliant; but in the trees, changing from simple green to many-coloured splendour, her sorrow-stricken eyes saw coming decay rather than increase of beauty; and on her ears the constant, dreary cawing of the rooks fell

like a prophecy of evil. She walked slowly, moving with the graceful pose and carriage that had never deserted her, her strange, purified face, with its expression of mingled submission and expectancy, raised now and again upward to the blue stillness of the sky, but oftener bent toward the green carpet at her feet.

Looking down, her eyes saw something white breaking the expanse of green a few yards ahead; when she came close to it she saw that it was a sheet of note paper; she stooped mechanically and picked it up. As she did so she saw that it was covered with writing; and she knew the writing; her eyes fell on, and read, something of what was written—"by the last train, and walk across the heath to Fanelands village, and sleep at the Crooked Billet. Come the first thing in——" Here came the end of the page.

As Rhoda read the words, she gave a little involuntary cry.

"What is it?" said a voice at her ear; and turning with a start she saw Paul close behind her.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"A letter of Tony's; he must have dropped it."

"What made you cry out?"

"I——"

"Who is the letter from?"

"Anthony Dexter."

"Ah!" Paul held out his hand. "Let me see it."

"I don't know," Rhoda said, "that you have a right to read a letter that is written to somebody else, without that person's permission."

"I have a right," he answered, "to read anything that causes my wife undue emotion. Give me the letter."

She did not move, and he took it out of her hand; then, standing beside her, he read it through.

"So your grandfather confided a secret to Anthony Dexter's keeping?" he said after a pause; "a secret concerning Tony, and of such a nature that it must be revealed before the father and son meet in London next week. Do you know this secret?"

"No."

"Anthony Dexter arrives at Winford station at eleven o'clock to-morrow night, and will spend the night at the Crooked Billet. Tony is to go and see him the first thing in the morning, but is to say nothing about his visit. When do *you* propose to see him?"

Rhoda turned away.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"I do not think," she answered, "that I am bound to listen to all you choose to say to me."

"Wait one minute," he said; "I have but one thing more to say to you. Two years ago, when I handed over your son to his father's care, I told Anthony Dexter that if he ever came near enough to Fanelands to run the risk of seeing the woman who had been his mistress, he ran the risk also of meeting with the vengeance I spared him long ago. Then I spared him for the sake of your name; now his death and your name would never be connected. He has run the risk once; he proposes to run it a second time. Do you think him a wise man?"

Rhoda came back a few steps.

"Paul," she said, "what have you in your mind?"

"Only," he answered with impassive face, "that your lover is rash. And now I am going to put his letter in Tony's room."

He went into the house. Rhoda stood still in the midst of the sunshine and listened to the cawing of the rooks: they still prophesied evil: but it seemed to her now that they spoke in plainer tones.

CHAPTER XXI.

For this ye knew not is she,
Whose bonds are broken in sunder ;
This is she at the last.

SWINBURNE.

It was the evening of the next day. Tony was playing in the hall, as his custom was when Alan Metcalf was free to come to Fanelands; Rhoda sat before the hearth. A small fire was burning, for the evenings were chilly, and she sat with her eyes fixed on the flames. So she had sat evening after evening, long ago, before Tony was born, when the organ was dumb, and had seemed to wait for the coming again of the musician who had worked on it a spell; and so she had sat when Tony was a little child, and she had feared to let him know that the organ had a voice. And now Tony was a man, and he played with the same strange enchantment that had pervaded the playing of Anthony Dexter, and he brought forth wonderful sounds from the instrument that she had hoped might never sound again.

She listened to him, as her custom was, half entranced by, half afraid of, the music that he poured forth; but she listened to-night with a divided consciousness; only a part, and that the smaller part, was given to the playing; her thoughts were busy with a problem nearer, more definite, than Tony and his fate; her heart was weighted with a dread more immediate and positive than the dread which had become part of the atmosphere of her everyday life.

Paul, as his habit was, had shut himself into the half-furnished room, in which, when he was indoors, he spent the greater part of his time; it was far away from

the hall; Rhoda sitting by the fire felt the length of staircase and corridor that separated him from her to be as miles and miles of sea, across which she could find no boat to carry her.

The time went on; she heard the music faintly, as though it were far away; it became to her like the cawing of the rooks; the chief note in it was one, less of vague forebodings, as it had often been hitherto, than of prophecy distinct and evil. At last it stopped; and in another ten minutes Rhoda found herself alone. Alan Metcalf had left Fanelands for the night and Tony had gone to his room. It was still early, but it was past Rhoda's usual time for going upstairs; when her husband came in, a little before ten o'clock, he did not expect to find her there.

"I have come to turn out the lights," he said.

She rose.

"Is it late?"

"Not late; but late for you."

Paul stood with his hand upon the lamp. Rhoda waited, her eyes scanning his face.

"Are you coming upstairs now?" she asked after a little pause.

He answered with another question:

"Why do you ask?"

She said in a voice that trembled:

"I hoped you might be."

"Do you mean that as advice?" he asked.

"As a supplication."

He did not reply for a while; then he said:

"I have no supplication to offer in return; but I will give you a piece of advice. Go up to bed, and do not concern yourself with me or my doings."

"Paul, will you listen to me?" she asked.

He answered: "No."

By half-past ten o'clock Fanelands Hall was in darkness, and it was quiet; the servants were all in bed; the three people who had no thought of rest were very still. Tony sat on the side of his bed, and heard through the silence snatches of the hitherto hidden music that was to live in his allegro; and all that he heard, and the dim vision that came with the wonderful sounds, he heard and saw in darkness; and in darkness Paul Garnet sat in his lonely room and waited till time should have travelled another hour; and in darkness, and in rigid stillness, a woman sat by an uncurtained window in an unused room at the front of the house, and looked out into the moonlight.

Outside too it was perfectly still and perfectly beautiful: the moon was so radiant that only a few stars dared to shine; a wonderful peace lay upon the trees and the lawn and pervaded the black shadows where night played with the brightness. The time went on and on; the shadows changed in outline as the moon rose higher in the sky; there was no other change, and no movement within or without the house; the woman sitting by the window did not stir, watching, with head a little bent and eyes that never wandered, the space of moonlight before the house. It seemed in this quiet place as though the world stood still; yet time passed none the less quickly for the fact that his steps were noiseless; and passion and fear and pain grew none the less surely because they spoke not in audible voice.

It was eleven o'clock. The clock downstairs spoke out through the stillness and chimed the hour; but its voice did not penetrate through the silent house; and the woman in the empty room heard no sound to tell her what progress the night had made. Nor did she hear other sounds that followed upon the clock's vibrat-

ing strokes, the sound of long footsteps and of doors that were opened and closed.

Round the corner of the house, out of deep shadow into the bright space of moonlight came a man; the moon shone full upon his face and showed it dark and set, and marked with unfaltering purpose; his shadow followed him, black and clearly cut.

It was then that the woman watching by the window rose from her seat; passing out of the room, she went quickly down the staircase and reached a small door at the end of the house. The door had been left unbarred; she opened it, and, passing out, sped swiftly across the grass to the corner where the footpath through the woods branched off from the drive.

She reached it almost at the moment that Paul Garnet reached it; he did not see her coming; she put a hand upon his arm and he turned and saw that she was by his side.

For an instant he was startled; then:

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"To stop you going further."

"Why should you try to stop me?"

"Because I know what you are going to do."

"I am going to kill your lover."

"He died long ago."

"Two deaths are not too many. I am glad that he has given me an occasion to satisfy my desire."

"You shall not use the occasion."

Paul looked into his wife's face; the moonlight gave it a pallor that was more than pale; her eyes met his unflinchingly. He narrowed his own.

"Do you think you can stop me?"

"I know I can."

Her hand was still upon his arm; her grasp tightened.

"Let me go," he said. "The time is getting on."

She answered:

"I will never let you go."

"Don't you know," he said in a low, strange voice, "that I am stronger than you?"

Her face still looked up at him; there was a sort of radiance upon it.

"I know," she said, "that your body is stronger than mine; but not your soul. My spirit is strong to-night with a force you cannot combat. You shall not go."

Paul gazed at her, almost forgetting, as he gazed, the purpose with which he had come forth, forgetting everything in the look of that wonderful face.

"What gives you your strength?" he asked, and his voice sank to a whisper.

It seemed to him that she smiled.

"It is love," she said.

He cried out: "Can you dare to say——"

She broke in: "I can dare all."

"For the lover," he said, "who has cast you off?"

"For the man," she amended, "who has cast me off."

"And this," he said between his teeth, "though he has forgotten, though he has taken a wife!"

"This," she agreed, "though he hates me."

"Let me go!" he cried, "or I shall kill you."

"Till you have killed me, I will not let you go."

He raised his hand.

"I mean what I say."

She did not move, she did not shrink an inch from the weapon he held so close.

"And I mean this," she said, "that if Anthony Dexter dies to-night, I die too. You shall not move from here till I am dead." Suddenly she loosed her grasp of his arm, and in an instant her arms were round his waist, her hands tightly clasped; her head was

thrown back; her eyes never left his face. "You shall not leave me," she repeated, "till I am dead."

He looked at her in wonder.

"Is your love so great?"

"Oh, it is great!" she said.

"So great," he went on slowly, "that you cannot bear to live after he is dead?"

"Not if he dies by your hand."

He cried out in a fierceness of anguish:

"What has he done that you should give your life to save him?"

"Not him, but you."

"I?"

"Yes; from a deadly sin."

He gave a wild laugh.

"And your love?"

"Is my despair."

"Your mad love taking virtue for a cloak——"

"It shall wear no cloak," she interrupted.

"Your scorned love——"

"Scorned, yes; but you shall understand."

All at once her arms were unclasped, and she fell back a pace or two; standing there, and wringing her hands as in an agony she said with a sort of cry: "I love *you*."

CHAPTER XXII.

At last I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, "Is there any hope?"
To which an answer peal'd from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand;
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn,
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn,

TENNYSON.

THE moon slid down the sky; it was long past midnight; the night air was very chill. Through Fanelands Hall the silence still reigned unbroken; all the inmates were asleep; Tony heard in fitful dreams the sounds that haunted, yet eluded, him waking. Outside the trees were motionless; no breeze was astir; and the night passed in a majesty of peace. Yet in the garden the stillness was not supreme: all night long Paul Garnet talked with his wife.

Anthony Dexter was at rest not far away; he had crossed the lonely heath in safety; unconscious of the danger that had threatened him, he was unconscious too that the danger was at an end.

The night died out, and the dawn broke gray and cold, as Rhoda had seen it break only a week ago. Then she had been alone with death; now new life was with her to watch the morning grow; yet it was hardly joy, so much as a sense of rest, that stirred in her tired heart as she walked by Paul's side. Paul Garnet's face was haggard and white, and his limbs trembled as he walked; the wildness had gone from his eyes, but the passion of the night left him dumb; for when the morning broke, it brought him a thought that was too terrible for speech. As the light grew, his words became fewer, then ceased; side by side he and Rhoda walked silently.

But when in the eastern sky a pink flush heralded the sun, the sweetness of the morning smote him as with a rod of bitterness, and his thoughts came forth in words. He stopped and spoke aloud.

"Your prophecy has come true," he said; "my curse has come back upon me; in your dread lies for me a still deeper dread."

"Yet the curse no longer divides us."

"Ah!" he cried, "but if God should answer my prayer!"

"If your prayer is answered," Rhoda said, "it was answered as God always answers prayers—before ever it was made."

He shook his head.

"Yes," she said, "it was answered in the recklessness that held me before Tony was born."

He looked at her, finding no words to say. Rhoda took him by the hand and led him forward, toward the sunrise.

The sunlight touched the tops of the trees and lay along the heath when Paul and Rhoda went into the house. The servants were not yet astir; only Tony was awake; and Tony lay still, listening for the music of his dreams. The morning was pure and cloudless: the subdued September blue of the sky, the changing trees, the flowers opening to the sun, all breathed a chastened beauty; but through the calm air the cawing of the rooks rose steadily.

It was eight o'clock when Paul Garnet passed through the garden with a letter in his hand; he went down the drive and into the village of Fanelands. Coming back ten minutes later, he found Rhoda waiting outside the small side door.

"I have been to the village," he said. "If Anthony Dexter must see Tony, he shall see him here."

He stood looking into his wife's face.

"Shall we go in?" she said.

"No, we will await him here, you and I together."

He moved on toward the gaily coloured flower garden, and Rhoda walked on beside him.

Inside the house, Tony had come downstairs and paced to and fro in the hall. He had slept little during the past night; and a whirl of music had filled the dark, wakeful hours and the dreams that broke in upon them. But his face showed no fatigue; a faint colour glowed on his thin cheeks; his eyes were bright. He had heard at last what he had waited so long to hear; his way seemed plain before him; but he could do nothing, be sure of nothing till he had spoken out on the organ the sounds that filled his brain. He had sent for Alan Metcalfe, and he paced to and fro in impatient longing; his nervous excitement grew as he waited, and his hands began to tremble.

At the Crooked Billet Anthony Dexter was early astir; he did not know at what hour Tony might come. When Paul's letter was brought to him, he sat a long time pondering; at last he rose and went out of the inn, and slowly took his way toward Fanelands Hall.

As he crossed the little bit of common and entered the drive, his mind was full of wonder; and through the wonder ran a joy of longing soon to be fulfilled; it arose in the thought that in a few minutes he would see Tony again; for the last two months had taught him that Tony was the centre of his life. Rhoda and Paul saw him coming, and went together across the dewy grass to meet him.

Inside the Hall, Tony played upon the organ. He had forgotten his appointment with Anthony Dexter, he had

forgotten everything but his music; he discerned the allegro at last; he almost grasped it; the power, the longing to attain to it fully, rose as he played on and on.

He trembled as he played. He could hear now the strange music he had dreamed of; the dim longing that had haunted him for years was clear at last; and he felt that he could sate the ineffable longing, that he could find the music's meaning, if he could but penetrate yet further into the mystery of sound, if he could dare to follow where it led. The organ cried in triumph and in pain; it obeyed his will and followed his desire; he felt his power grow in kind and in degree till the little world about him faded and grew pale, and a new world opened. And he played on; and the new world came nearer. The woman and the two men stood outside in the garden and talked in pausing, broken sentences together; in their minds was the thought of days past long ago, but still not dead; their words were of the future. The scent of lavender came to them as they talked; there was a freshness in the air that tempered the warmth of the sunshine; all about them was an atmosphere of peace. And standing there in the beauty of the early morning, it seemed to each one that the guilt of the others shrank within the borders of forgiveness, for each heart saw the darkness and felt the weight of its own sin. Silence fell upon them, and stretched away and away through the woods and across the heath to Heather Den. It was broken only by the cawing of the rooks; and through the little space of charmed minutes Rhoda could not cease to listen to the sound.

The clock struck nine.

"Come inside," said Paul Garnet. "Tony is in the hall."

"I can hear him," Anthony answered; "he is playing."

But Rhoda, listening, began to tremble.

"Yes," she said, "he is playing."

Tony sat at the organ; he did not stop playing, he did not look round, as his mother entered the hall, nor when the two men followed her.

She spoke to him, and Anthony spoke, but he did not hear; and there was something in the weird music that he played that bound them to stand still and listen. It rose and rose; it whirled from passion to frenzy; it wailed and cried; it swelled in fierce exultation. They stood and listened, awed, motionless, with hearts that beat quickly, they knew not why. It seemed as if the music could strain to no higher pitch; and yet it still rose; and the three listening figures stood by and waited. The music grew wilder and wilder, the madness of it panted through the hall, the longing of it strove more restlessly; then the melody was tangled and lost and broken; the sweep of it halted and snapped; and the straining harmonies rioted into incoherent discords.

All at once the playing ceased; and as the jarred sounds broke and died, Tony sprang away from the organ, and threw up his arms above his head, and uttered a cry. Then they saw his face; and Anthony Dexter, looking at it, knew that the child of his sin could feel his love no more; and Paul, looking at it, knew that the curse he had prayed for had fallen surely; and Rhoda, looking with eyes informed by a terrible knowledge, knew that Tony had passed through the open door.

The three figures, the woman who had fallen, the two men who had sinned against her, remained quite still:

it was to them as though they stood at the bar of God and heard the giving of their sentence.

Outside, an old man weeding in the garden was singing at his work. The sound came into the hall as he passed along the path; and the words:

“ But oh for the rest beyond ! ”

Sept 26/91

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